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JUNE 2014 VOLUME 24 ISSUE 6

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

# Sight & Sound

STUDIO  
GHIBLI  
SPECIAL

# MIYAZAKI

TAKES FLIGHT WITH 'THE WIND RISES'

PLUS

● JIA ZHANGKE ON 'A TOUCH OF SIN' ● PAUL SCHRADER'S 'THE CANYONS' ● 'FRANK'  
● DAVID THOMSON ON CINEMA AND THE GREAT WAR ● THE S&S INTERVIEW: DARIO ARGENTO

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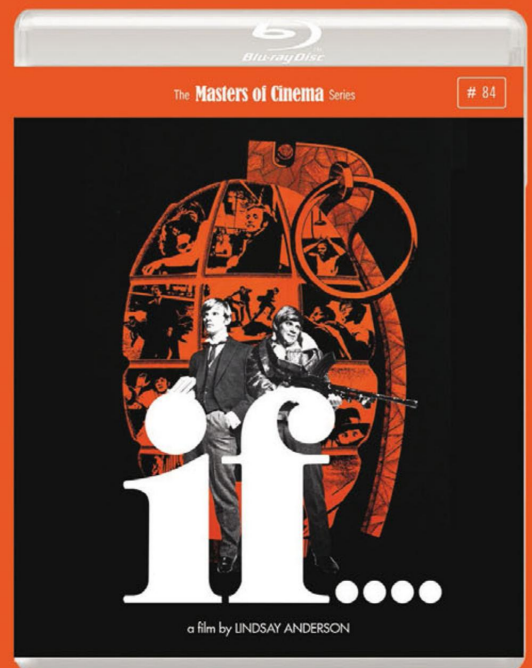
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Jia Zhangke's Cannes prizewinner *A Touch of Sin* brings a touch of genre film-making to a daring anatomy of violence in present-day China. By **Tony Rayns**

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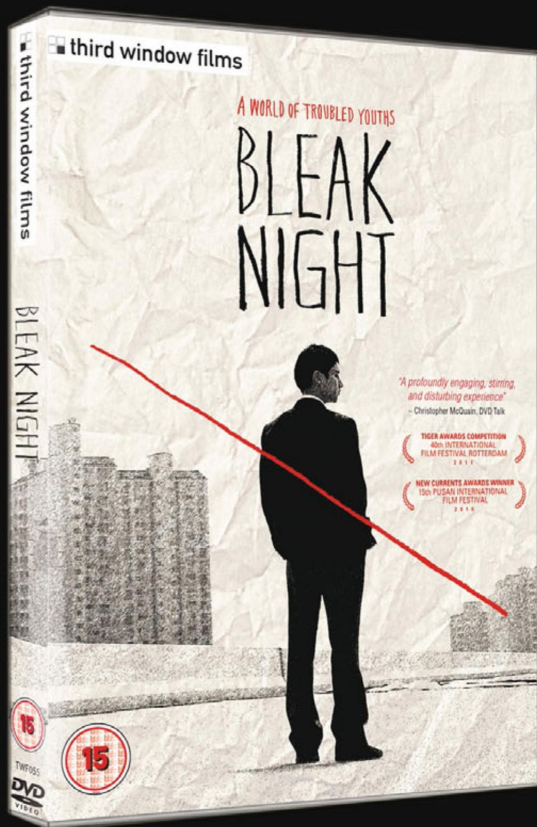
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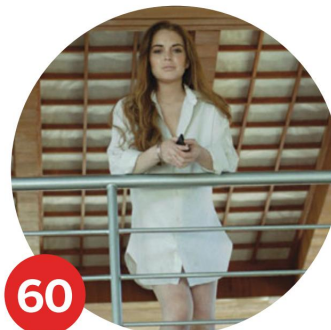
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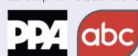
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# Editorial Nick James



## YAKETY YAK

I'm writing this from New York, on my last day at the Tribeca Film Festival, and so, naturally, I'm thinking about Jean-Luc Godard – no, this is not a gentle parody of Mark Cousins, I'm just pondering the title of Godard's latest film *Goodbye to Language* (*Adieu au langage*), because in a city so full of garrulous folk, the idea that language is going away somewhere might easily get the reaction, "You gotta be kidding me."

One reason why French cinema is on my mind here is that I've just seen the Cannes Directors' Fortnight programme – which, for Tribeca, is a tough comparison. Godard, however, is in the main Cannes Competition and I'm wondering whether the film is the director's farewell to language or him suggesting that language is saying goodbye to us. The film's trailer threatens that "something is going to happen here with language" and suggests in a quotation that, "In the I of 'I think therefore I am', the I of 'I am' is no longer the same as the I of 'I think'." We might guess from this – though we should also expect to be outguessed – that the film's title and the rupture of identity it posits might well in part be Godard's take on the way that verbal language is said more broadly to be withering under attack.

According to a piece by communications consultant Susan Tardanico on the Forbes website, "Electronic communication has overtaken face-to-face and voice-to-voice communication by a wide margin. This... has been driven by... the speed/geographic dispersion of business, and the lack of comfort with traditional interpersonal communication among... Gen Y and Millennials. Studies show that these generations – which will comprise more than 50 per cent of the workforce by 2020 – would prefer to use instant messaging or other social media than stop by an office and talk with someone."

In that sense, spoken language may be on the wane, but here I am in a city of talkers thinking about a French-Swiss director who is most associated with Paris, another city of great yakkers. Thierry Jousse – an editor of *Cahiers du cinéma* in the 1990s, now a filmmaker – once told me at an event in Mexico that cinema is an aural medium. "At last, I understand French cinema," I said. But Jousse was right in that verbosity is what much of American and French cinema – the two most dominant industries from the birth of the medium – have in common; they both draw heavily on traditions of walk-and-talk in films, as perhaps best exemplified by the likes of Woody Allen and Eric Rohmer.

*Cinema and TV have the advantage over the written word of being able to represent body language, which, according to some studies, accounts for 93 per cent of what we communicate*



Natural verbosity is probably one reason why writers in Paris and New York have so often dominated the discourse around cinema. If we suppose, however, that speech content really is diminishing from the feature films popular with the generations mentioned above, and that in their communications with each other people hide their true complex feelings behind a personal propaganda of selfies, emoticons and acronyms, then the day of natural verbalisers in film may be reaching an end.

Or maybe not. Take the subject of Thai director Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit's attempt to film a Twitter feed, *Mary Is Happy, Mary Is Happy* (see page 10), about whom he says, "What was remarkable about her tweets is that she tweets what she thinks, not what she sees." Is this the division of Godard's quote, that when we just reflect back what we see, as most tweeters do, we're not the same entity as when we try to communicate what we think? After all, 'Mary Malone' is a Thai girl who has decided that, for online purposes, she is an 'American singer'. So who is she when she tweets what she thinks? Her thoughts may be those of a created character, rather than real attempts at communication.

Cinema and television have the advantage over the written word of being able to represent non-verbal body language, which, according to studies cited by Tardanico, accounts for an astonishing 93 per cent of what we accurately communicate. So if we are indeed evolving a culture of invisibility in which, "awash in technology, anyone can hide behind the text, the email, the Facebook post or the tweet, projecting any image they want and creating an illusion of their choosing", then film and TV about people who talk a lot may indeed become a compensatory pleasure. Roll on the next episode of *Girls*. ☺



IN THE FRAME

## STIFF COMPETITION



The ice storm: Nuri Bilge Ceylan's epic 196-minute *Winter Sleep* could prove the most heavyweight entry in this year's Competition

Beyond the anticipation generated by the usual auteur heavyweights in Cannes Competition, it's a significant year for UK talent

**By Jonathan Romney**

It's always thankless trying to take advance readings of the pattern in the Cannes carpet. It's only after the festival that the picture really starts to make sense – once you know which hitherto unsuspected gems have made people sit up, and which among the most hotly tipped have failed to. One thing is sure: once again, the high concentration of A-list auteur names in Competition will bring complaints that

the official selection has become a blue-chip insiders' club. So be it. That simply means that the Competition continues to be unmissable, while there's no shortage of new names in official sidebar Un Certain Regard and standalone sections Directors' Fortnight and Critics' Week. Of course, whether these last two get their share of attention depends on whether audiences are willing to stray up the Croisette, or just work through the big names clustered in the Palais; there's only so much legwork that even the most dedicated *festivalier* can physically take on.

If you're a *S&S* reader, then no doubt you already have on your radar the Competition offerings from names like Assayas, the Dardennes, JLG (in 3D with *Adieu au langage*), along with the British double-header of Mike

Leigh and Ken Loach, and the Canadian triple-header of Cronenberg, Egoyan and meteoric up-and-comer Xavier Dolan. Meanwhile, for those in search of the exalted auteur aura that used to attach to names like Tarkovsky and Angelopoulos, there are two contenders to watch. One is Russia's Andrei Zvyagintsev (*The Return*), whose *Leviathan* is reputedly his modern-day retelling of the Job story. The other is Turkey's Nuri Bilge Ceylan whose *Winter Sleep*, shot in snowy conditions in Cappadocia, could well prove the most heavyweight entry in Competition – and not only because it's the longest, at 196 minutes. Meanwhile, Japan's Naomi Kawase offers this Competition's sole Asian entry (*Still the Water*), while the reunion between Zhang Yimou and Gong Li (*Coming*

### An Autumn Afternoon

A restoration of Japanese director Ozu Yasujiro's last film (right), the heartbreaking, elegiac tale of an ageing businessman (long-time Ozu collaborator Ryu Chishu) and his daughter, arrives on big screens across the UK from 16 May.



### Terracotta Far East Film Festival

A focus on the Philippines is one highlight of this London festival dedicated to Asian cinema (23 May-1 June). Raya Martin's thriller 'How to Disappear Completely' receives its first UK showing alongside work by lesser-known indie filmmakers and genre hits such as Erik Matti's 'On the Job' (right), which is getting a Hollywood remake by Baltasar Kormákur.



ON OUR  
RADAR



*Home*) is in an out-of-competition slot.

As for newer names, Italy's Alice Rohrwacher (*Corpo Celeste*) makes her Competition debut with her second feature (*Le meraviglie*); precocious prodigy Dolan makes his with his fifth (at age 25), *Mommy*; and the only real unknown is Argentina's Damián Sziffrón with *Wild Stories*. The Competition spotlight can be unfairly cruel to newcomers (ask Julia Leigh, director of 2011's *Sleeping Beauty*), although it can create stars too; you can only wish Sziffrón good luck and nerves of steel.

Possibly the Competition's most political film will be *Timbuktu*, from Mauretanian-born director Abderrahmane Sissako – inspired by the stoning by Islamists of an unmarried couple in Mali – while two special screenings go to documentaries about current events, respectively in Ukraine (Sergei Loznitsa's *Maidan*) and Syria (Ossama Mohammed's *Silvered Water*; *Syria Self-Portrait*, which draws heavily on YouTube footage).

Un Certain Regard has plenty of familiar faces – Alonso, Amalric, Argento (Asia), De Heer, Ryan Gosling as director. It also has several esteemed names whose auteur stock is still maturing: Ruben Ostlund, Jessica Hausner, Jaime Rosales. But a fabled and elusive name to watch here is France's Pascale Ferran, whose superb *Lady Chatterley* inexplicably

failed to score on its UK release. Her long-awaited *Bird People* is about a stray American in Paris: Ferran has a reputation as a 'director's director' (if not as a French female Terrence Malick), so this is one to keep an eye out for.

Apart from Loach and Leigh, it's a significant year for UK talent. Andrew Hulme – best known as an editor, notably with Anton Corbijn – turns to directing with *Snow in Paradise* (screening in Un Certain Regard), while Directors' Fortnight sees the comeback of John Boorman, with *Queen and Country*, as well as Daniel Wolfe's Yorkshire-set thriller *Catch Me Daddy* and Matthew Warchus's *Pride*. Also in this section, watch out for *L'il Quinquin* (*P'tit Quinquin*), a comedy for TV by Bruno Dumont (yes, you read that right – a comedy). There's also the indefatigable documentary maker Frederick Wiseman, this time exploring the National Gallery, and Damien Chazelle's Sundance Grand Jury Prize winner *Whiplash*. If Chazelle's feature is nearly as good as the teaser short I saw last autumn, expect it to be really something – and J.K. Simmons's performance as a martinet jazz instructor should provide as galvanic a wake-up as anything in the fest. ⑥



**Keep track of what S&S contributors make of this year's Cannes via our rolling festival coverage online at [bfi.org.uk/sightandsound](http://bfi.org.uk/sightandsound)**



**Art cinema:** Mike Leigh's *Mr. Turner*, starring Timothy Spall, is screening in Competition in Cannes

## British Pathé

The newsreel company's full archive – 85,000 films made between 1896 and 1976 – is now available on YouTube. The treasure trove includes films from both World War I and II as well as historical footage of major events, stars, sports, fashion, culture and more.



## Dennis Potter

It's 20 years since the great British television writer died. A four-part celebration of Potter's work, from his early semi-autobiographical Nigel Barton plays to 'The Singing Detective' (right), will run throughout June and July at BFI Southbank, London, and will continue in June and July 2015.



## FAMOUS FIVES

### BEAST VS CITY FILMS



One of the most eagerly anticipated summer blockbusters is Gareth Edwards's take on *Godzilla*, released in the UK on 15 May.

Below, the British director, who catapulted to Hollywood after his 2010 debut, the low-budget sci-fi road movie *Monsters*, selects the five 'Beast vs City' films that have had the biggest influence on him. ⑥

- 1 King Kong**  
Ernest B. Schoedsack, Merian C. Cooper 1933
- 2 Godzilla** (right)  
Honda Ishirō, 1954
- 3 Them!**  
Gordon Douglas, 1954
- 4 An American Werewolf in London**  
John Landis, 1981
- 5 Day of the Triffids**  
Ken Hannam (BBC series, 1981)



## QUOTE OF THE MONTH JANE CAMPION

'I seem to have been able to make a career out of doing what I feel like doing, so why not keep doing it? What's corrupting is wanting to be more important'

**Campion was the first female filmmaker to win the Palme d'Or and this year becomes the first female director to act as Cannes jury president**



## Palestinian cinema

Hany Abu-Assad's drama 'Omar' (right), the first film to be fully funded by the Palestinian cinema industry, is set for release on 30 May. Meanwhile the Palestine Film Foundation presents 'The World is With Us' (16 May – 14 June) a series of screenings and exhibitions at venues across London, including rare films documenting the Palestinian struggle.





# IF THE SHOE FITS

From Oedipus to *Black Swan*, nothing says more about a mother than the shoes she puts on her child's feet



**By Hannah McGill**

Lars von Trier's *Antichrist* (2009) shapeshifts part-way through, from a close-up study of the destructive effects of grief to an unabashed

witch trial for its female protagonist. In evidence against her, the film leads with the notion that she deliberately deformed her son by making him wear his shoes on the wrong feet. The change of focus is arguably detrimental to the film's effectiveness – a blunt but striking allegorical evocation of the effects of the loss of a child on a couple's relationship and sexuality backtracks to become an unconvincing sheddunnit – and whether the director wishes to foment or protest against negativity about women is as obscure as ever. But the symbol chosen for bad mothering, the mis-shoeing of a baby, is a resonant one. The character played by Charlotte Gainsbourg (that she never gets a name provides ballast for the interpretation that she represents the witch in all women) has rejected the basic requirements of motherhood – the provision of comfort and the adequate conditions for healthy growth. Or her psychiatrist husband has invented a backstory because he so fears a world in which, as a talking fox in the woods tells him, "Chaos reigns" – a possible dig by von Trier at psychoanalysis and its insistence that we have agency in what befalls us.

Either way, and even if any real child would be liable to whinge unbearably until the wrong was corrected, shoes on the wrong feet give us a startling sense of how simply parenting can be done wrong, through inattention, malice or some derangement of the caring instinct. "We are of course reminded of the devil's traditional cloven hooves," writes Ian Christie in his Criterion Collection essay on *Antichrist*. "Was she grooming him as an 'antichrist', like the sinister coven that ensnares the heroine of Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby*?" But Rosemary embraces her cloven-footed child; unfortunately for all humanity, she's brimful of maternal instinct. By deforming his feet, *Antichrist*'s She grooms her child only to trip, fall and die. Meanwhile Rob White, in *Film Quarterly*, reminds us that the name Oedipus literally refers to a "hurt foot", and wonders if She is engaged in "some extreme protest against the trademark Freudian 'complex'". We might also wonder if her actions are intended to call to mind an ancient crime against women, that of footbinding. One of the many tearjerking moments of Wayne Wang's *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* (2011) is a sequence in which a mother watches, mouth cruelly set, as her small daughter is made 'marriageable' by having her feet bound. Love, as in *Antichrist*'s weird marital sex scenes, has somehow mutated into torture.

Since children's feet are frequently claimed as emblems of vulnerability and perfection –

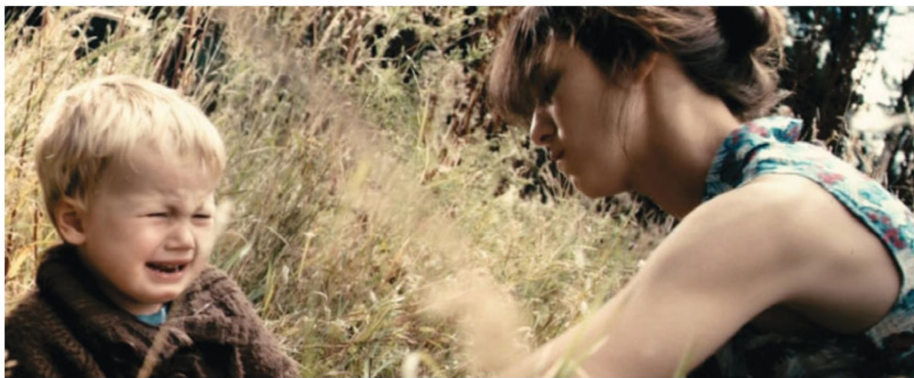


**Dance macabre:** *The Red Shoes* emphasises the blood, sweat and tears that go in to creating ballet

cooed over, photographed, preserved during babyhood as tiny prints or bronze casts – it's perhaps unsurprising that children's shoes have a sentimental function, usefully demonstrated by that six-word story apocryphally attributed to Hemingway: "For sale: baby shoes, never worn." *Gravity* borrows the direct emotional appeal of that famed scrap of flash fiction. The backstory it offers to absolve its female protagonist, Ryan Stone, of the suspicion of being just a coldly committed (and overly masculine?) scientist is the loss of a child; the poignancy is driven home by the message

Ryan wants relayed to her dead daughter in the afterlife, "Tell her Momma found her red shoe."

The image links Ryan, consciously or not, to another monomaniacally committed female professional whose work puts her in the path of danger: Vicky Page, the tragic ballerina of *The Red Shoes* (1948). *The Red Shoes* emphasises, through the fierce commitment Vicky must apply to her work, the blood, sweat and tears that go in to the creation of the most ethereal, delicate and 'feminine' of artforms. Vicky runs to her death in red ballet shoes that are then placed on the stage while her signature ballet




**Mother of tears:** Charlotte Gainsbourg's She ties her son's laces in Lars von Trier's *Antichrist*





*Children's feet are frequently claimed as emblems of perfection – cooed over, photographed, preserved*

goes on without her. Rather more grisly, in the fairytale from which the film takes its name, a young girl who cannot stop dancing has her feet amputated, only to be haunted by them continuing to dance before her. *Black Swan* (2010), which takes the dance obsession of *The Red Shoes* to lurid extremes, emphasises the horrors endured by the feet of its ballerina protagonist, Nina: they're bloodied, blistered, and, as madness encroaches upon her, even webbed. Here once again, the torture of young feet is watched over by an ostensibly loving but covertly destructive mother: Nina's oppressive, obsessive matriarch, Erica. Lars von Trier has yet to add a ballerina to his stable of put-upon female characters but, according to his own claims, his mother looms over his work no less insistently than Erica does over Nina. "Every film, I try to irritate her, even though she's dead," he has said, "so she's still having a lot of influence. Every film is basically to irritate her and provoke her." 

BRITANICAL ARCHIVE (C) KOBAL COLLECTION (C)

## THE FIVE KEY...

# FILMS BY MUSICIANS

Film and music are intimately connected, but the leap from sound studio to film studio is not easy to make

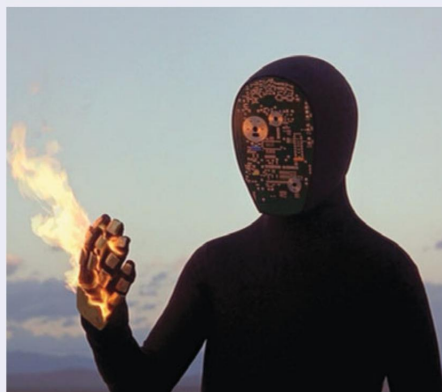
### By Sam Davies

In cinema history, music comes before dialogue; and when the talking began it was in a film about a jazz singer. This month alone sees documentaries about Pulp and Bikini Kill's Kathleen Hanna, plus Gruff Rhys (Super Furry Animals) wandering the Midwest in *American Interior*. Many film-makers have made music for their own films (Satyajit Ray, John Carpenter) or as side projects (David Lynch and Jim Jarmusch have recently released albums). But while musicians often move behind the camera to direct videos, concert films or genre-defying items like Bob Dylan's 1972 travelogue-tour film hybrid *Eat the Document*, surprisingly few have gone as far as directing a feature.



### 2 True Stories (1986)

After the success of Talking Heads concert film *Stop Making Sense*, lead singer David Byrne directed this portrait of a fictional Texan town, based on stories clipped from tabloids. He called it "60 Minutes on acid": its deadpan framing of the weirdness of the everyday will change the way you look at Norman Rockwell forever.



### 4 Electroma (2006)

French electronic duo Daft Punk had already overseen production of anime *Interstella 5555: The story of the secret star system* (2003). For *Electroma* they built a surprisingly poetic live-action narrative about two wandering robots out of a series of vignettes using music by Linda Perhacs, Brian Eno, Todd Rundgren and more.



### 1 Electra Glide in Blue (1973)

Session musician James William Guercio hit the big time producing Chicago's early albums, then produced, directed and scored this cult curiosity. Inverting road movies like *Easy Rider*, in which counter-culture rebels fall foul of the law, Guercio's film has a highway patrolman getting entangled in the hippie underground.



### 3 Human Highway (1982)

Under the pseudonym Bernard Shakey, Neil Young spent four years and \$3 million creating this absurdist musical comedy, set in a gas station diner next to a nuclear plant as the world ends. Audiences were baffled, but several of the cast became Lynch regulars, and the score was the first of many by Devo's Mark Mothersbaugh.



### 5 The Man with the Iron Fists (2012)

Hip-hop producer RZA's plan to direct a kung fu film was no surprise: samples from Chang Cheh, Joseph Koo and countless Shaw Brothers productions are woven into almost every album he's worked on. Reviews were mixed, but as an exercise in genre, its depth of knowledge and love for the form is undeniable.



# MEMORIES ARE MADE OF THIS

Thai director Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit portrays a digital generation who can't recall this life, let alone past ones

**By Trevor Johnston**

The deserved festival success and global arthouse distribution Apichatpong Weerasethakul has achieved can't help but have opened doors internationally for Thailand's independent cinema. Best, perhaps, not to expect anything quite so singular to appear in his wake; yet the first two features by Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit are evidently strong enough to warrant attention in their own right. Whereas Weerasethakul's work – such as *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* – springs in part from a very personal mythology, Thamrongrattanarit instead finds something fresh and personal to say about the universal contemporary verities of digital media and associated devices.

This 30-year-old writer-director initially made waves at Korea's talent-spotting Busan Film Festival by taking the 2012 New Currents Award for his 68-minute debut featurette *36* – so titled because it employs three-dozen single-shot scenes to piece together a tale of romantic yearning prompted by a female photographer's kaput portable hard drive, her only connection to a location scout she wants to get back in touch with.

Thamrongrattanarit's day-job has been writing scripts for one of Thailand's commercial studios, though the gently unfolding *36* could hardly be more different, balancing a playful formalism with a subtly melancholy tone. More ambitious still, his second film *Mary Is Happy, Mary Is Happy* – supported by the Venice Biennale College – takes up the challenge of dramatising a real-life Twitter feed, whose 400-plus tweets appear on screen to punctuate a freewheeling, sometimes friskily daft, sometimes achingly poignant rites-of-passage tale as the eponymous final-year high-school student confides her hopes and fears online. Thankfully, both titles will see a UK release this year, and the filmmaker's recent visit to London's Pan-Asia Film Festival afforded an opportunity to catch up with him.

**Trevor Johnston:** Did the idea for *36* come from the sort of catastrophic data loss many of us experience at least once?

**Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit:** Actually, no. I was at the Berlin Film Festival in 2009 and saw a note on a hostel bulletin board saying, 'Alex, I put my memory on the counter.' Now you know they're talking about a memory card or something like that, but it got me thinking about how we hold on to the past, and how much I could lose if one of the many hard drives I have at home had a problem. Photos I can never recover, video I can never reshoot. Will I remember everything?

**TJ:** Which is precisely the question the film asks: these days, is memory in the mind or do we need data to somehow ratify it?

**NT:** The thing about snapping away on digital cameras is that each image is not something to be remembered. Go through your hard drive



Fuhgeddaboutit: Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit

*I was at the Berlin Film Festival and saw a note on a hostel bulletin board saying, 'Alex, I put my memory on the counter'*

afterwards, and you'll find all these pictures you never recall taking. And we don't memorise them, because we know they'll be on the memory card. That's what's different about memory today.

**TJ:** Your central character descends into a spiral of anxiety for that reason. It's as if she doesn't trust herself to remember the guy she now realises she's fallen for?

**NT:** People are afraid of losing the moment. Go to a concert these days and everyone's shooting it on their phones. I tried it once and realised I was watching the gig through a tiny LCD screen. I might as well have been on YouTube. Obviously, we can't remember everything, but I do think the best memories somehow stay with us, even if we don't have the data to back it up.

**TJ:** How did you choose the film's 36-shot form?



Look snappy: *36*


**NT:** It was about recreating the feeling of getting an old roll of film back from the developer.

You'd have all these individual pictures and somehow, you'd want to make a story which connected them. You've got pictures out of focus, maybe some badly framed, but in that imperfection you add your own personal feeling. I went to the locations, chose my 36 best pictures, and then we went back and shot the movie working from that photo-storyboard.

**TJ:** You also have that rigid structural device, within which you find something very personal to the character, in *Mary Is Happy* – how did you come up with the idea of filming a Twitter feed?

**NT:** What interested me was the idea that when you read a tweet from somebody you create a version of that person in your mind, which will probably be very different from the reality. 'Mary Malony', whose tweets we used, is one of my followers [whom I chose] because I thought it would be easier to get permission. She's a Thai girl, but she has this English username, and her profile reads 'American singer'. What's the reality there? So that's perfect for the film.

**TJ:** Because you and the audience have to fill in the gaps?

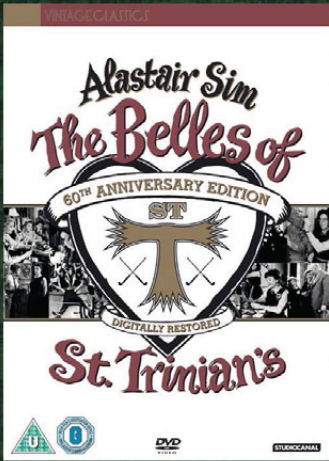
**NT:** Of course, and what was remarkable about her tweets is that she tweets what she thinks, not what she sees, unlike a lot of other girls her age. That gave me space to interpret, even though it was a challenge sometimes to work out what was going on. I chose not to talk to her before writing the script, because in some ways the film had to reflect my subconscious too, while also seeming like it was a portrait of a teenage girl's life, both her reality and her imagination. As the writer, I'm in control of Mary's thoughts, yet I'm also being controlled by Mary's tweets. That's how I think about life, how we're actually controlled by things we can see, and things we can't. You can call it fate, but there's no escape. 

**i** *36* is released in the UK on 6 June and is reviewed on page 89. *Mary Is Happy, Mary Is Happy* will follow in the autumn



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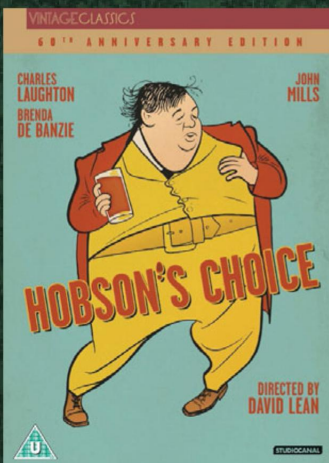


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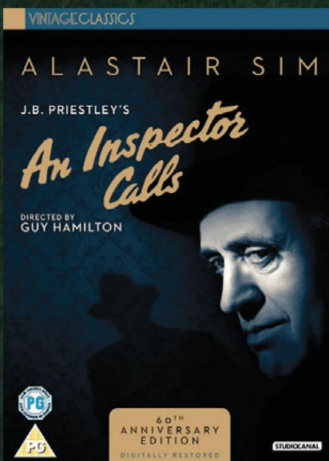
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# THE HI-LO COUNTRY

Once upon a time, cinema was happy to ride the whole range of class experience. But lately, fences have been put up



**By Mark Cousins**

Cinema is a hi-lo country. From the start, it was an attraction for ordinary people, and was looked down on by the bourgeoisie; yet

inherent in its cubist ability to fragment time and teleporting sense of the instant elsewhere, it was also something highbrow, something that has excited our intellects for a dozen decades now, and shows no sign of letting up.

Many of the best British films are hi-lo:

Terence Davies's *Distant Voices Still Lives*, one of the most refined films ever made, is set purely in working-class Liverpool; Nicolas Roeg and Donald Cammell's *Performance* is high art about low life; Charlie Chaplin's background was very poor, and his main character was homeless, but he gave comic cinema elegance and precision; the tension in *This Sporting Life* and *O Dreamland* is there, in part, because Lindsay Anderson, from a posh background, is ambivalent about his working-class subjects; the movies of Lynne Ramsay and Alan Clarke render ordinary lives in extraordinary forms; and Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin* combines high art and street life in compelling ways.

Beyond the UK, directors like Martin Scorsese and François Truffaut put new, working-class lives on screen in heightened guises. Actors as varied as Sean Connery, Marilyn Monroe, John Garfield, Joan Crawford, Eddie G. Robinson and Samantha Morton found their own mode of hi-lo, a rough-smooth movie stardom that earthed the silver screen. And that ultra-proletarian Canadian-Russian Louis B. Mayer ended up defining the gloss of cinema's second and third generations. The movies, the art of space-time, need a bit of Hegel. The electric shadows need to be earthed.

Mooch around the UK film world today, however, and you won't find loads of earthing. There are lots of great people (and a good smattering of dingbats), but not loads of commoners. I was struck by this recently when I spent a few days in Scotland, where I live, with the great Iranian director Mohammad-Ali Talebi. I asked him where he wanted to have dinner. The industry norm when you host a visiting director is to book a nice restaurant. He said, "You've seen my films – somewhere humble, please." Posh makes him feel uncomfortable.

We'd make better films if there were more of us like Talebi. A 2012 report by Irena Grugulis of Durham University and Dimitrinka Stoyanova of the University of St Andrews, *Social Capital and Networks in Film and TV: Jobs for the Boys?*, told us what we probably already knew, that the UK film and TV industry is still dominated by the middle classes. Actors like Andy Serkis and Maxine Peake have made the same point. Too many of its people went to private schools, unhealthy places that, at their worst, breed ailments (elitism, detachment,



self-regard) that sicken society as a whole, and the film industry's corner of it. Digital has made film more democratic, but the industry's social structure remains plutocratic – more hi than lo. Hi people believe in the idea of the 'guilty pleasure', a bizarre category in which they can admit to having fun while showing that they know that the fun is beneath them. Po-mo lo.

I love our arts cinemas, and go around them regularly, but they silently say to the middle classes: "This is for you. We have your favourite Rioja. We beam live opera and National Theatre productions." They do brilliant work, but imagine if they had Xboxes, or fishfinger sandwiches, or beamed the *Strictly* final too. Too much of a takedown? Have I lost you yet?

The massive under-representation of lo matters. It deprives the film world of passion, brio, instinct, ideas, warmth, surprise, wisdom, melodrama, inhibition, perspective and noise. I am making a film about my own background, working-class Belfast. If I was working with one of the many nice researchers that you get in the film world, they'd have to spend time infiltrating

*Chaplin's background was very poor, and his main character was homeless, but he gave comic cinema elegance and precision*

the parts of the city that they had never been to, the parts where I grew up. Instead, I phoned my cousin, who immediately told me about two great, gallus women he knows. I met them. They were half Terence Davies, half David Lynch. My film will be better, and wilder, because of them.

My point is not at all that lo is better than hi, it's that they work well together in the movies. There's lots that I hate about my background, and love about middle-class life, but too much hi brings problems. In the area of taste, for example, hi comes a cropper. Middle-class taste is unlikely to have imagined the musical numbers of Busby Berkeley, the excesses of *Vertigo*, Deanna Durbin or Ramesh Sippy's *Sholay*. These things are the ghosts in the machine of our artform. More politically, if the film world continues to feel that it is of the middle classes, we risk excluding the next François Truffaut, Lynne Ramsay, Mohammad-Ali Talebi or Martin Scorsese.

If we are not happy about taking this risk, what will we do about it? We have the organisation Women in Film, which is great, but could we imagine Working-Class in Film? The idea sounds absurd, and membership rules would be interesting, but if not that, what? In my series *The Story of Film: An Odyssey*, I said film history has been racist by omission. I think the under-representation of lo in hi-lo is commission as much as omission. If so, if the Grugulis-Stoyanova report is right, it's a disgrace. **S**



DEVELOPMENT TALE

## THE TWO FACES OF JANUARY



Face to face: Viggo Mortensen as Chester, with Kirsten Dunst as his wife Colette in Hossein Amini's Patricia Highsmith adaptation *The Two Faces of January*

*Drive* writer Hossein Amini faced almost 20 years of setbacks bringing Patricia Highsmith's novel – his directorial debut – to the screen

**By Charles Gant**

Thanks to his Oscar nomination for adapting Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove* (1997), and other early credits including *Jude* (1996) and *The Four Feathers* (2002), screenwriter Hossein Amini is often associated with literary, period and upscale work. His enduring passion for the pulpy crime genre, and especially for *noir*, is less appreciated, partly because certain screenplays were not produced, or films were barely seen.

Amini read Patricia Highsmith's *The Two Faces of January* more than two decades ago when still at university, and soon began mulling the story's potential as a film. The tale of a young American slumming it in Athens who gets caught up in the lives of two compatriots when he unwittingly helps them cover up a murder, it wasn't one of the author's most acclaimed or widely read books, and periodically fell out of print.

Following Amini's work on Michael Winterbottom's Thomas Hardy adaptation *Jude*

(1996), BBC Films' then head Mark Shivas tried to option *The Two Faces of January* for the fledgling scriptwriter to do next. But, explains Amini, rights holder Diogenes is "very protective of the Highsmith brand", and said no. "The idea of giving it to a fairly untested screenwriter... I just think I wasn't significant enough," Amini says.

Years later, Amini met producer Tom Sternberg, who had written *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999) with Anthony Minghella, and had a good relationship with Diogenes. By this time, Amini had done a rewrite for Martin Scorsese's *Gangs of New York* and signed a three-picture deal with Harvey Weinstein's Miramax, which was to include his directorial debut as the third title. Says the screenwriter, "This was one of the reasons I did the deal: I wanted to write and direct *Two Faces*. I remember going into a room and pitching it to Harvey, and him losing interest after about two minutes. I realised then, when you are a screenwriter, people are more interested in you as a writer than a director. There are loads of directors out there. I had a hunch even then that I was never going to direct the third one, and it would disappear as part of the deal, which it did."

Eventually, Amini turned to Anthony Minghella, whom he'd first met at a screening of *The Wings of the Dove* – the experienced director

had been brought in to help on the final cuts ("He was Harvey's go-to brain in terms of what was working with the film"). The Development Fund at the UK Film Council agreed to put up the money for the writing of the screenplay, including optioning the book from Diogenes, with Minghella's Mirage producing. "Anthony read one draft and gave really good notes," says Amini.

Minghella died unexpectedly in March 2008, and two months later his Mirage partner Sydney Pollack also died. Suddenly the film was stuck in legal limbo. "There was an impasse, tricky issues," says Amini, who adds that Minghella's widow, Carolyn Choa, was the "guardian angel" who "came in and freed the whole thing up". Son Max Minghella and Mirage's Tim Bricknell remain executive producers on *The Two Faces of January*.

The next break came with a key piece of casting via his US agents WME. "I got this call saying Viggo Mortensen is interested in the script, go and meet him in Madrid. I assumed it would be a movie-star scenario, waiting two days, and then be summoned for half an hour. He walked to my hotel, took me out for dinner. He was so gracious and so incredibly well-mannered. There's something very unstarry about him. He said, 'I like the script, I'm open to you directing it, and good luck.' So



it went out with Viggo and me as a package.”

The film finally came together with Paris-based StudioCanal, which brought on board Working Title to beef up the producing side, and Robyn Slovo (*Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*) to be the hands-on producer. Kirsten Dunst, playing Colette, the young wife of Mortensen’s character Chester, gave comfort all round to investors, and probably made it easier to attach lesser-known Oscar Isaac in the lead role of Rydal. “I wanted to cast Oscar from the beginning,” says Amini. “But I knew, and I think he knew as well, when we first spoke about it, that it wasn’t likely to happen.” Landing the lead in the Coens’ *Inside Llewyn Davis*, another StudioCanal film, helped Isaac’s cause.

Throughout all these years, the success or failure of the project was also bound up in Amini’s personal stock. “It was up and down,” agrees the filmmaker, who adds that his career went through “a tricky period”. He spent a lot of time developing a new film version of Dorothy Hughes’s novel *In a Lonely Place* (previously made into a 1950 Nicholas Ray film starring Humphrey Bogart and Gloria Grahame), which never got made. His *Shanghai* script took years to get into production, and the little-seen Mikael Häfström film that resulted in 2010 bore scant relation to it. As for John Madden’s *Killshot* (2008), adapted from the Elmore Leonard book, “I got fired and it was rewritten.”

Amini says, “*Killshot* and *Shanghai* slightly re-energised me. I thought maybe I can reinvent myself as a writer-director, and do something small from England, rather than the States

*When you are a screenwriter, people are more interested in you as a writer than a director. There are loads of directors out there*

where I just felt that everything was getting chopped and changed and buried. I definitely felt my career was in serious decline.”

Then *Drive* (2011) fell into Amini’s lap, beginning a turnaround in his fortunes. Initially, signs for the Nicolas Winding Refn title weren’t that propitious – “It was such a dark process in post [production], and wasn’t particularly well-liked by the distributors. It was looking like it might struggle to find a cinema release. Before it went to Cannes, I thought that was going to be the one that kills me off for good. Then we had those press reactions, and everything changed. I don’t know if I’d have been able to get *Two Faces* made without the success of that film.”

Despite all the bumps along the road with *The Two Faces of January*, Amini feels that the extended process has helped deliver a richer stew. “Over the years, it had changed a lot in my head,” he says. “I’d always really loved *The Sheltering Sky*, and I love those Antonioni movies about relationships: *L’avventura*, *La notte*, *L’eclisse*. So it became the Highsmith novel, with a lot of my other favourite influences in film and books, F. Scott Fitzgerald among them. These influences found their way into the adaptation. That’s because I’d lived with it for so long.”

**i** *The Two Faces of January* is released in the UK on 16 May and is reviewed on page 92

## THE NUMBERS EVENT CINEMA

By Charles Gant

Over the past few years, it’s been clear that the live projection of plays, operas, ballets and other alternative content has been a growth industry for UK cinemas, with niche players such as the Picturehouse chain making it a core part of their offer. But getting a commercial measure of the activity has been another matter altogether, since this growing revenue stream has been omitted from official box-office reports tracked by data gatherer Rentrak.

Recent months have seen the introduction of alternative content – now more sexily relabelled ‘event cinema’ – to UK box-office reporting, and for the first time Rentrak has supplied an all-time top ten for the category (see below).

What the numbers show is that, while the New York Met Opera made the early running in live events beamed into cinemas, it is live theatre that is now indisputably dominating the sector, with seven of the top ten slots. The National Theatre’s *War Horse* pulled in a whopping £1.55 million for its live showing in February – grossing more on that day than all the films on release did put together – and with encore screenings has gone on to a total of £2.71 million. And that’s just from the UK – *War Horse* was also shown to audiences all over the world. Box office for event cinema will be reported later this year in Germany, France and Spain, which will give a clearer indication of global reach. Melissa Keeping of the Event Cinema Association – the trade body formed just over 18 months ago – comments: “I have to hand it to NT Live. They are dominating this. They’ve done an extraordinary job. More power to them.” The poaching of Film4 head Tessa Ross to be its next chief executive [see Brewster, page 16] may indicate the direction of the National Theatre’s thoughts about global growth.

Given relative costs, producers of culturally engaged cinema aimed at upscale audiences can only look at these numbers with envy.



Riding high: the National Theatre’s *War Horse*

Ralph Fiennes’s film of *Coriolanus*, with a rumoured production budget of around £5 million, earned £901,000 in the UK from its entire theatrical run in early 2012. A couple of years later, the Donmar Theatre’s stage version, starring Tom Hiddleston, grossed £754,000 from a single night; with encores the total is now up to £952,000.

Event cinema is having unexpected impacts on the film industry, especially with respect to the four-month theatrical window that multiplex chains demand prior to a film’s home-entertainment release. Last November, hundreds of cinemas participated in the BBC’s *Dr Who: The Day of the Doctor* – a piece of content that was far from exclusive and in fact shown simultaneously for free on television. So it’s clear that, when it suits, this window can be flexible. Recent screenings of Lars von Trier’s *Nymph()* and Alain Guiraudie’s *Stranger by the Lake* were able to play in multiplex cinemas despite a window-busting video-on-demand release, because they were presented as special live events (ie with talent participation) rather than regular releases. What started as a few cinemas showing some ballet and opera could end up shaking the whole economic model for film exhibition. **S**

### EVENT CINEMA: ALL-TIME TOP TEN AT THE UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
‘War Horse’, National Theatre	Feb 2014	£2,714,773
‘The Audience’, Gielgud Theatre	Jun 2013	£1,877,531
‘Doctor Who: The Day of the Doctor’	Nov 2013	£1,835,115
‘Frankenstein’, National Theatre	Mar 2011	£1,598,859
‘Richard II’, RSC	Nov 2013	£1,440,509
‘Coriolanus’, Donmar	Jan 2014	£952,323
‘Othello’, National Theatre	Sep 2013	£936,419
‘Macbeth’, Manchester Festival	Jul 2013	£863,896
‘The Nutcracker’, Royal Ballet	Dec 2013	£737,673
‘The Sleeping Beauty’, Royal Ballet	Mar 2014	£734,833

Thanks to Rentrak



## EARTHQUAKE WEATHER

## BFI FILM FUND INSIGHTS

Tessa Ross's departure from Film4 has left a big gap in the film industry – and some big questions about what comes next



By Ben Roberts

Can you remember where you were when you heard that Tessa Ross was leaving Film4? For many in the British film industry

last month, it was that seismic an event.

I was with our partners at Film London when the 'Breaking News' popped up on my laptop that Tessa was joining the National Theatre as chief executive after more than a decade at Channel 4. It was newsworthy enough for me to interrupt the meeting and, though we returned to matters at hand after five minutes of excited discussion, there was a clear sense around the table that this was a pretty big deal.

Judging by the enquiries from the journalists who called our press department for quotes, no one had seen this coming. Within hours, national and trade press were mourning her departure from the industry, and eulogies poured in from directors, producers and colleagues.

Of course, her loss to film is profound, but was it a surprise? Channel 4 closed down the previous iteration of the company, FilmFour, (encompassing production, UK distribution, international sales) in 2002, after a number of perceived high-profile failures, such as *Lucky Break* and *Charlotte Gray*, and with TV and pre-sales markets deeply in recession. It was quietly reborn as Film4, a more boutique development and production department on a scaled-back £10 million budget. Under Tessa's stewardship, with a renewed focus on UK talent and activity, Film4 flourished. Over the last decade it has developed filmmakers bravely, often flying in the face of obvious commercial and ratings sense. Tessa's Film4 is undoubtedly seen as a success by the outside world. Oscars crowned the critical and box-office success of *Slumdog Millionaire* and *12 Years a Slave*, and the international brand awareness they gave Channel 4, coupled with loyalty to Tessa, has drawn talent to the TV and film divisions.

Film4 was a founding partner in Protagonist, the international sales company that I was recruited to run in 2008. Film4's challenge and mandate to Protagonist was to look after selected new films (starting with titles such as *Tyrannosaur* and Ben Wheatley's *Kill List*) and the Film4 library, in the process reinforcing their brand values. But as Channel 4's reputation for mould-breaking and provocation recedes, it gets harder to say what those brand values are. Much has been made in the media of the homogenisation of

*With two Best Picture Oscars and a Bafta, perhaps Tessa Ross felt she had done everything she could at Film4*



The departed: Tessa Ross

Channel 4's output, and Film4 the TV channel is now heavily populated with youth-skewing US comedy and fraternity-friendly classics. Like the BBC, Channel 4 hasn't found much room to show off its in-house film productions outside on-demand services and graveyard timeslots. Tessa and Film4's determination to take risks and support talent they believed in – for 20 years a mission at Channel 4's heart – has felt at odds with the direction of travel.

The surprise success of *The Inbetweeners Movie* threw down a gauntlet. A feature film born out of a Channel 4 property, financed largely on forecasts of 4DVD Home Entertainment revenues, and taking £45 million at the UK box office (with a sequel on the way)... How does a broadcaster focused on ratings and revenues square away that kind of success with, say, the brilliant and critically adored *Under the Skin* – a film with at least twice the budget of *The Inbetweeners* and whose total UK box office will be less than *The Inbetweeners* grossed on its first day. Reluctantly, I would imagine, even if it is *Under the Skin* that will be remembered 20 years hence.

Even before she announced her departure, many assumed Tessa would look to recruit an executive with strong 'comedy chops' to strengthen the ranks. But with two Best Picture Oscars and a Bafta for Outstanding British Contribution to Cinema, perhaps Tessa felt she had done everything she could at Film4.

What shape will the succession take? It is almost impossible to imagine Film4 without Tessa at the helm; but I suspect that her replacement will need to bring some pragmatism to the role – perhaps gaining the trust of Channel 4 by delivering some successes on its own terms, and using that trust to carry on supporting risk-taking new talent. Chief executive David Abraham has said Channel 4 will keep supporting the UK film industry, and for now film remains part of its public service delivery. In October 2010 Channel 4 increased Film4's annual budget to £15 million for the next five years, of which nearly four years have gone.

My own hope – like that of many anxious filmmakers – is that Tessa will be replaced by someone with an equally strong passion for cinema, for developing and protecting talent, and with the strength of personality to fight for the value of film in a televisual and online world. @bfiben

## IN PRODUCTION

● **Paolo Sorrentino** is to write and direct *The Young Pope*, an eight-part TV series about a fictional Italian-American Pope. The series will be produced by Italian production company Wildside, who said in a statement, "The series is about dreams, fears, conflicts, battles, the search for meaning and the need for love of a pope, seen through the prism of Sorrentino's unique vision capable of creating worlds that are at the same time incredible and more real than reality itself."

● **Sono Sion**, director of *Love Exposure*, *Himizu* and *Cold Fish*, among many others, is set to direct *Shinjuku Swan*, a live-action adaptation of Wakui Ken's 38-volume manga series set in Shinjuku's Kabukichō red-light district. The series follows an unemployed young man who becomes a street scout for club hostesses and adult-video actresses.

● **John Woo** has completed filming on his passion project *The Crossing*, whose story depicts the journey of three couples from mainland China to Taiwan during the revolutionary era of 1949. The \$60 million 3D epic stars Takeshi Kaneshiro, Zhang Ziyi, Song Hye-Kyo and Nagasawa Masami, and joins a raft of other big-budget Chinese 3D productions aiming for release at year-end, including Tsui Hark's *Taking of Tiger Mountain*, Jean-Jacques Annaud's *Wolf Totem* and Jiang Wen's *Gone with the Bullets*.

● **Andrew Dominik**, director of *Chopper*, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* and *Killing Them Softly* is in production on *Blonde*, based on the novel of the same name by Joyce Carol Oates, which fictionalised the life of Marilyn Monroe. Jessica Chastain is to play Monroe, replacing the previously attached Naomi Watts.

● **Timur Bekmambetov**, director of *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* is reportedly being lined up to direct a reboot of *Ben Hur*, in a co-production by MGM and Paramount. According to *Variety*, the project is being developed from a script by Oscar-winning *12 Years a Slave* screenwriter John Ridley, who in turn rewrote a first draft by Keith Clarke.

● **Abdellatif Kechiche** (below) is to follow *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* with *La Blessure*, a coming-of-age story about a 15-year-old girl, based on the novel *La Blessure, la vraie* by François Bégaudeau (author of the novel that Laurent Cantet adapted as *The Class*). Bégaudeau set his novel in France, but apparently Kechiche is planning to relocate the story to Tunisia.







TIME OUT



THE GUARDIAN



HEYUGUYS



BEST DIRECTOR  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

"AN INTENSE EXPERIENCE"

CINEVUE

"A POWERFUL, DISQUIETING  
PIECE OF CINEMA"

HEYUGUYS

A FILM BY AMAT ESCALANTE

# HELL

HE MUST FIGHT TO SAVE HIS FAMILY

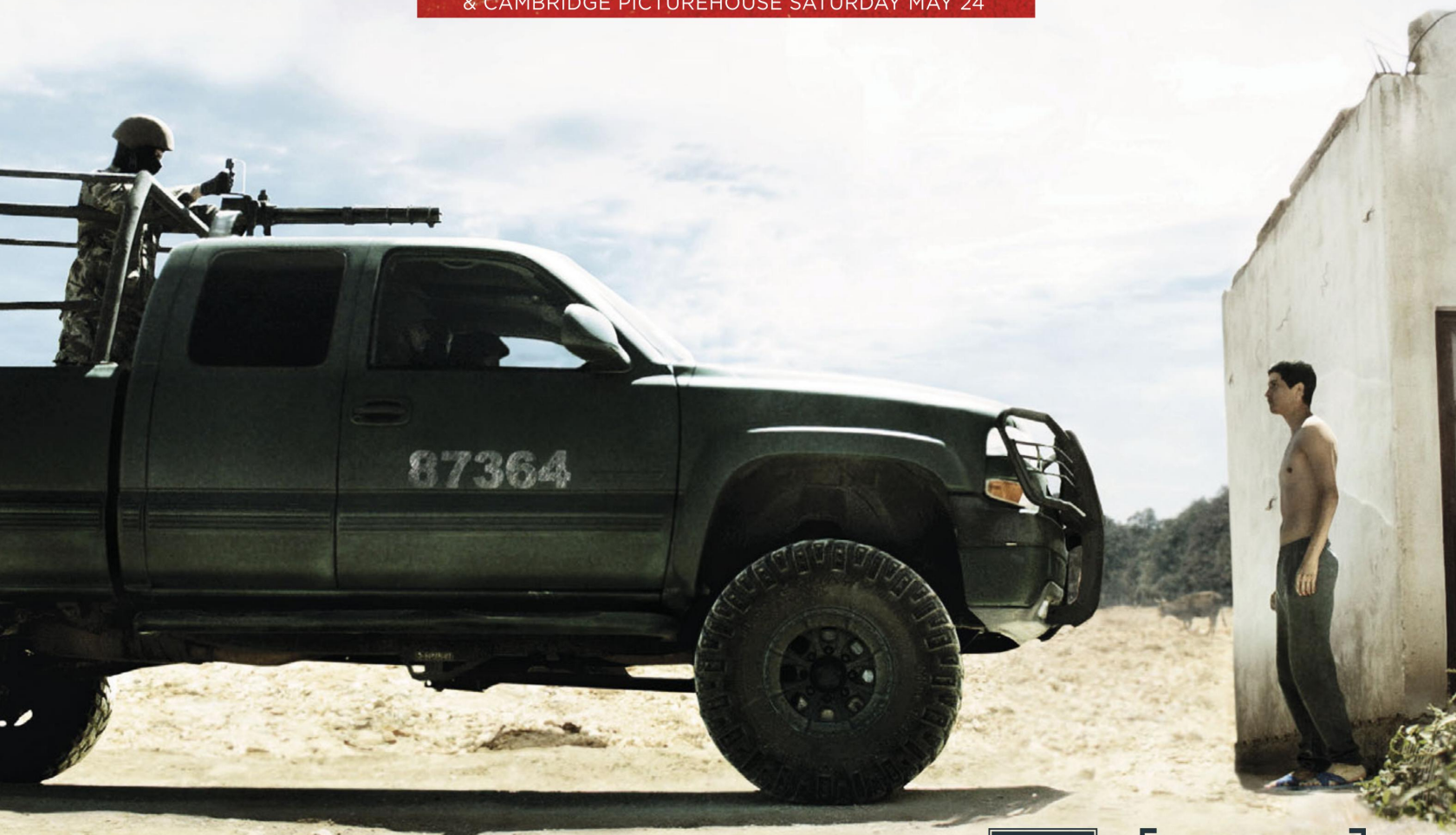
18 CONTAINS A SCENE OF STRONG SADISTIC VIOLENCE

IN CINEMAS & ON DEMAND MAY 23

LIVE Q&A'S WITH DIRECTOR AMAT ESCALANTE

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& CAMBRIDGE PICTUREHOUSE SATURDAY MAY 24



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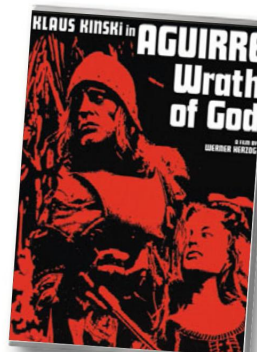
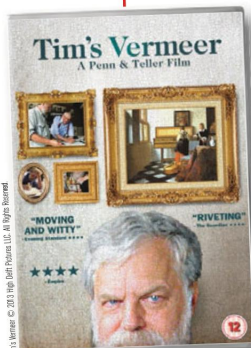
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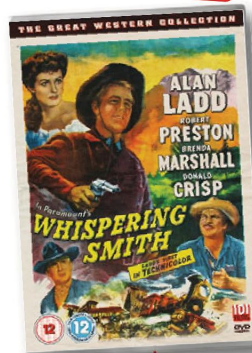
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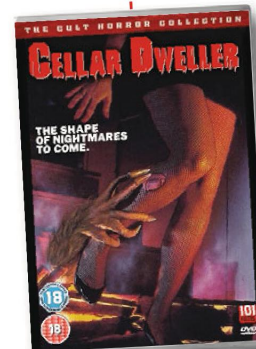
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THE INDUSTRY PROFILE

# SILVER REEL

Gnomes, watches, bankers – and now high-profile movies: Silver Reel is bringing a little bit of Hollywood to Zürich

By Geoffrey Macnab

Zürich-based film financing and production outfit Silver Reel is commonly described as the European answer to Megan Ellison's adventurous, well-resourced Annapurna Pictures in the US. Just as Annapurna regularly backs films (*The Master*, *Her*, *American Hustle*) that the Hollywood studios might find too risky, Silver Reel has supported projects such as *Under the Skin* and *The Railway Man* that more timid financiers have shied away from.

Company CEO Claudia Bluemhuber came into the film business from a wealth management background, setting up Silver Reel in 2009 with former Bank of Ireland executive Ian Hutchinson and Florian Dargel. It backs between four and six films a year in the \$15-\$50 million range, and is able to finance films fully if required. Although based in Switzerland, the company has strong connections in the US and has backed such films as Walter Hill's *Bullet to the Head*, Steve Jobs biopic *Jobs* and thriller *Getaway*. "We pride ourselves on trying to bridge and integrate the different worlds," Bluemhuber says of the company's mix of European and American projects.

Silver Reel is one of the backers of the 2014 Cannes opening film, *Grace of Monaco*, directed by Olivier Dahan, in which Nicole Kidman stars as the Hollywood actress who married into European royalty. Before the news broke about its Cannes berth, the trade press carried lurid stories about the deteriorating relationship between Dahan and his US backer, The Weinstein Company.

"The point is that there are very strong creative people at work," says Bluemhuber, parrying questions about alleged rows between the French director and Harvey Weinstein. What matters most, she suggests, is that "we have a great movie at hand that is opening the Cannes festival".

Bluemhuber acknowledges that *Grace* wasn't an easy production. Material was destroyed accidentally in the labs, requiring reshoots. "That always puts on extra pressure if something like that happens. We were covered by insurance but if you're losing some of the stuff you've done, that's always difficult."

She also accepts there may have been a "cultural clash" on *Grace* between the European filmmakers and their American partners. "The US market and the French market are very different," she says.

Not that she thinks this should be a surprise to anybody. "It always happens, quite frankly, if you have a strong director and a strong distributor and a strong producer. Sometimes it gets out [in the press] and people go, 'Whoa!'"

But the friction, she believes, often helps to create a better movie – and she argues that it isn't necessarily a problem if there are different versions of the same film for different markets. She points out that Silver Reel is filmmaker-driven and wouldn't support projects as oddball



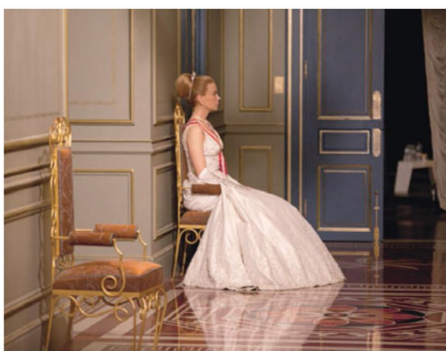
On a (Swiss) roll: Claudia Bluemhuber of Silver Reel

and visionary as Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin* if it wasn't. "But if you have a [US] studio that is distributing your movie, they will always have the right to make suggestions on what they think will work. That is something we all have to live with if we want our movies to be shown."

She adds that "being a filmmaker-driven company doesn't mean you just take on board a cut by the director. It is still very much a process between the director and the producers."

Silver Reel invests money on behalf of wealthy private Swiss financiers. Its current projects include serial killer drama *Solace*, starring Anthony Hopkins and Colin Farrell (now in post-production), horror picture *Maggie*, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger and Abigail Breslin, Scott Hicks's new feature *Fallen*, Tom Tykwer's *A Hologram for the King*, starring Tom Hanks, and

*If a US studio is distributing your movie, they will always have the right to make suggestions on what they think will work*



Nicole Kidman in *Grace of Monaco*

dystopian sci-fi drama *Z for Zachariah*, starring Chris Pine, Margot Robbie and Chiwetel Ejiofor.


The company is also working on several projects with Raindog Films, the new production company set up by Colin Firth and former Sony UK Chairman Ged Doherty – among them thriller *A Foreign Country*. Winner of the CWA Ian Fleming Steel Dagger 2012 for best thriller, *A Foreign Country* is the first in a series of novels by Charles Cumming about a disgraced MI6 officer called Thomas Kell, whom Firth is likely to play on screen.

"It is a very strong partnership. We have several projects that Raindog is developing. We provide financing for that and develop them with them."

Bluemhuber insists that Silver Reel is "very hands on", not just a financier in the background. She and her colleagues give notes on the material, the director, the cast and every other aspect of the production. "We look at the dailies and we become very involved in post-production. We are very, very involved in the editing process." At the same time, the company works closely with distributors, sales agents and banks. It packages and produces projects as well as investing in them.

There aren't many other European companies like Silver Reel, that produce as well as finance and have the contacts and resources to make everything from genre fare to Tom Tykwer and Jonathan Glazer films.

When *Grace Of Monaco* screens in Cannes amid the familiar Riviera hoop-la, the attention will be on the stars, the Rainier family and Harvey Weinstein. But while Silver Reel's contribution is likely to be overlooked, it's worth remembering that without the company's involvement, the film might never have been made. 

 **Grace of Monaco is released on 6 June and will be reviewed in our next issue**





# FREE FALLING

*'The Wind Rises', a fictional biography of the designer of Japan's famous Zero fighter plane, and the swansong of Japanese director Miyazaki Hayao, is a movie unlike any he has made and yet absolutely true to his preoccupations. Here we look back at the turbulent dreams of flight, freedom and progress in the great Japanese animator's films* **By Nick Bradshaw**

## HIGH FLIER

**The Wind Rises**, directed by Miyazaki Hayao (above), offers a fictional biography of Horikoshi Jirō (right), the engineer of many of the fighter planes with which Japan launched the Pacific War

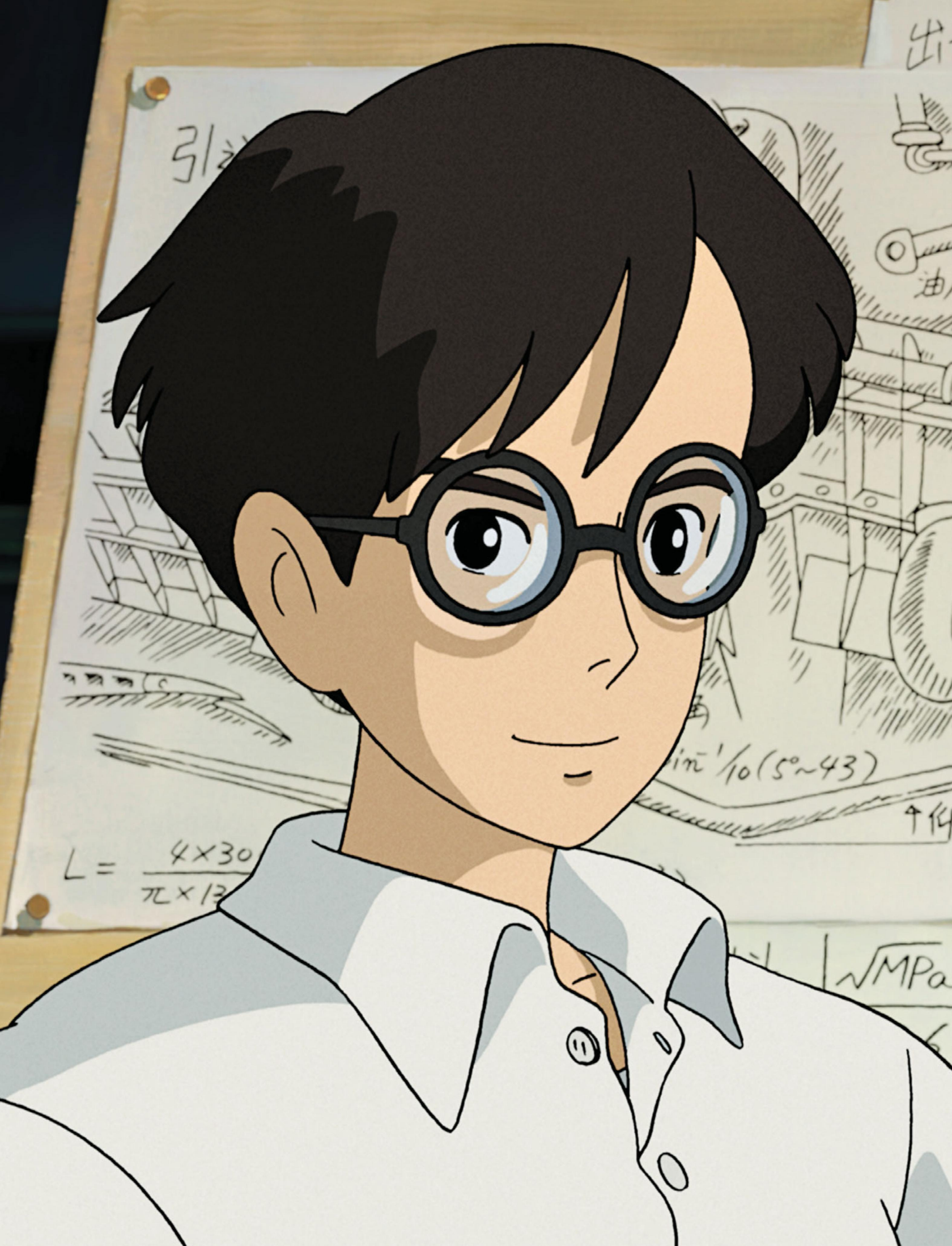
*'God made everything out of nothing. But the nothingness shows through'* Paul Valéry

**Here's a theory:** for an artform (and a technology) mostly so adept at capturing our fantasies, the movies have rarely rendered our primeval dreams of flight. Perhaps it's hard to get right. Think of Leonardo DiCaprio's Howard Hughes in *The Aviator* (2004), scattering his wealth to the winds as he tries to frame his WWI dogfighters for *Hell's Angels* (1930): "Why the hell do they look so slow? This isn't what it was like up there. They look like a bunch of goddamn models". *Angels* was the loudest of that brief flurry of pre-WWII knights-of-the-air dramas made by flyer-directors that included William Wellman's inaugural Oscar-winner *Wings* (1927) and Howard Hawks's *The Dawn Patrol* (1930). (Latterday complements to the genre include Roger Corman's 1971's *Von Richthofen and Brown* and Jan Svěrák's 2001 *Dark Blue World*, whose aeronautics Miyazaki Hayao has admired.)

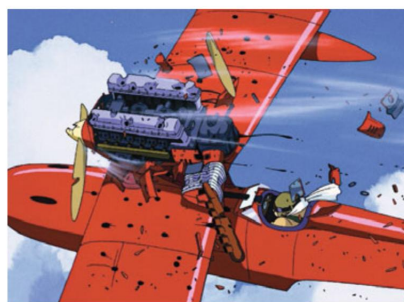
But these are military dramas that overwrite the wonders of levity with those of downing the enemy; nor, I would suggest, did our common ancestors devote their dreaming hours to fantasies of bomber runs or mishaps on jumbo jets. Hawks gave perhaps the greatest live-action account of the thrills and











⬅ dangers of solo-flight escapism in *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939), a film that doubles as a tribute to the derring-do of private mail flyers between the wars. Dorothy Arzner, meanwhile, doffed her flying helmet to the aviation pioneers while aiming for the glass ceiling in *Christopher Strong* (1933), with Katharine Hepburn as Cynthia Darrington. In the age of colour cinema, there is that acme of jet-powered drama, *Top Gun* (1986), with its need-for-speed hot-wire to the lizard brain and cocksure exultations for capitalism's competitive edge; and more innocently, there is *Fly Away Home* (1996), with Anna Paquin building a microlight to persuade her adopted Canadian geese to fly the coop.

Perhaps the last great live-action aerial touchstone is *The Right Stuff* (1983), whose era-straddling rendition of the turn from aeronautical individualism to corporate

#### FLYING ACES

*The Wind Rises* (above right, in an exclusive storyboard sketch for the film) is in many ways the culmination of Miyazaki's fascination with flying that has been evident throughout his career in films such as (clockwise from top) *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989), *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984), *Porco Rosso* (1992) and *My Neighbour Totoro* (1998)

space exploration points to another reason for the paucity of flight films: air is now conquered, and has been for most of the lifespan of the movies, during which time air travel has passed from the domain of poets to bureaucrats. Space is now our frontier, and the object of the gaze of our movie fantasists. Even Georges Méliès gave it more attention.

And yet, notwithstanding the era in which we find ourselves, these are dreams surely etched deep within us. In his 1986 book *The Flying Machine and Modern Literature*, Laurence Goldstein quotes the Romanian religious historian and philosopher Mircea Eliade: "The longing to break the ties that hold him in bondage to the earth is not a result of cosmic pressures or of economic insecurity – it is constitutive of man... Such a desire to free himself from his limitations, which he feels to be a kind of degradation, and to regain spontaneity and freedom... must be ranked among the specific marks of man."

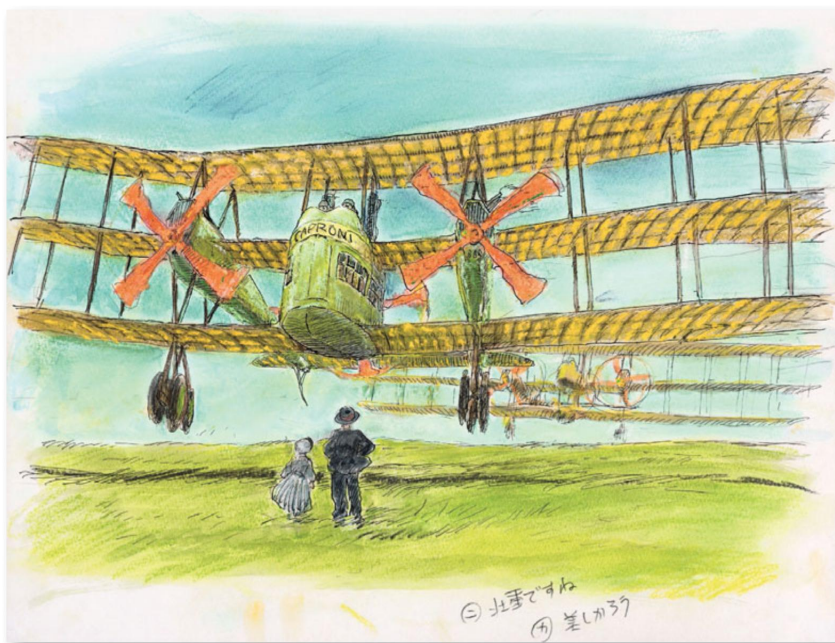
Animation, of course, may be able to cut to the heart of these ideals better than live action: think of Disney's *Dumbo* (1941) or *Peter Pan* (1952). Yet if Miyazaki is incontrovertibly the cinema's greatest poet of our dreams of flight, the irony is that this is a mark of his grasp of our species' roots, his sympathy for our past and our essence, as much as it is his manifold qualities as a fantasist and student of aeronautics. In how many films has he cast young flight-fixated extensions of himself? There is Pazu, the young mining-town orphan in *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (1986), who keeps a dove-cote and is building a plane to corroborate his late father's claim of a floating castle hidden in the clouds; Tombo, the local plane nut who tries to build a flying bicycle and ends *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989) dangling from a loose Zeppelin; and Fio, the brilliant granddaughter of Milanese air mechanics in *Porco Rosso* (1992), whose characters are named in tribute to both aviation and animation pioneers.

This last feature, until now Miyazaki's most plane-obsessed, is set in a Hawksian romantic sanctum of freelance flyers-without-borders in the Adriatic, and stars a flying pig – a once-human WWI ace turned porcine bounty hunter – as well as a buffoonish troupe of air pirates, not unlike those in *Laputa*. (A fellow pig narrates Miyazaki's 2002 short *Imaginary Flying Machines*, exclusive to Tokyo's Ghibli Museum.) The young princess of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984), meanwhile, shows her leadership bona fides partly by piloting a small jet glider with such prowess that it becomes an expression of her affinity with the film's maligned natural world.

Nor is technology the only way to the sky for Miyazaki's characters. Sheeta, in *Laputa*, floats with the aid of a magical amulet; Kiki, the trainee witch, flies by broomstick when she has her mojo working; both Totoro and the Catbus carry Satsuki and Mei over the treetops in *My Neighbour Totoro* (1988); Haku transforms into a flying dragon and does battle with paper *shikigami* in *Spirited Away* (2001); while in *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), Howl not only carries Sophie off her feet to walk high over the town square, but lives a wearied nightlife as a bird who battles the warplanes of state.

All of which is to say that Miyazaki is profoundly in tune with that longing to break the ties that ground us, whether through magical technology or seemingly non-technological magic. He understands our thirst for spon-





taneity and freedom – the metaphor of flight as self-determination – as well as the metaphor of animation as a kind of flight, with its ability to conjure still drawings off the page and into our imagination. No other filmmaker makes the spirit so soar.

#### THE DREAM OF FLIGHT

*The Wind Rises*, which Miyazaki has said will be his last movie (he said the same of 1997's *Princess Mononoke*, but is this time "quite serious"), is inimitably a Miyazaki film, a clear culmination and distillation of many of his passions and preoccupations, and yet in many ways it is his most atypical. Using as its launchpad the idea of a fictional biography of Horikoshi Jirō – the chief engineer of many of the fighter planes with which Japan launched the Pacific War, notably Mitsubishi's legendary dogfighter the A6M Zero – it's self-evidently his most adult film, as well as his most realist in terms of its setting, albeit refracted through several layers of art. (Previously Miyazaki's method has been precisely to refract history and geography through several layers of wishful fantasy, from the Victorian London of his TV series *Sherlock Hound* (1984-85) to *Princess Mononoke*'s representation of Muromachi-period Japan.)

*The Wind Rises* starts with a simple dream – the dream of flight – and yet it is also Miyazaki's least uplifting, most ambivalent and in many ways melancholic film; the trajectory is that of Icarus, or the arc of a life. We meet Jirō as a classic Miyazaki boy, dreaming of mounting the winged roof of his house and soaring across the local fields and town – before the sky clouds over with warplanes bulging with black ninja-like bombs. Though a speccy, bookish youth of a sort you assume to be allied to his creator's own self-memory ("[I was] a weakly boy who loved airplanes," Miyazaki wrote for a 1998 Japanese edition of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Wind, Sand and Stars*), Jirō has the gumption to pick an unequal fight with school bullies, only to be reprimanded by his mother, who lectures him that "fighting is never justified". He grows up as a talented student of engineering with a Gaudí-esque flair for natural architecture, delighted by

*Miyazaki is in tune with that longing to break the ties that ground us. No other filmmaker makes the spirit so soar*

the curve of a mackerel bone in his lunch. But he also witnesses nature's destructive power in the form of the Kantō earthquake of 1923 (Japan's most powerful recorded until the Tōhoku quake of 2011), which tears red through the ground like another of Miyazaki's hallucinatory nightmares, then sparks a fire tornado that intones eerie murmurs of doom as it devours Tokyo.

There's also much emphasis on the poverty and economic instability and underdevelopment of 1920s and 30s Japan: arriving to work at the Mitsubishi corporation in Nagoya, Jirō passes one of many bank runs, while an encounter with two wary young street waifs highlights his slightly unworldly naivety and good intentions. As he earns his spurs at Mitsubishi, Jirō's visions and premonitions continue: a plane sketch takes flight in his mind only for the wind to find its weakness and rip it apart; after a visit to the Junkers factory in Germany, he dreams of a Japanese bomber crashing and burning in the snow. Back home the country is still so pre-modern it uses oxen to pull new aeroplane prototypes from the factory to the landing field. "Who's the army planning to bomb with this thing?" Jirō asks, and twice prognosticates: "Japan will blow up."

There's a heavier emphasis in the film: thrice we hear the couplet from Paul Valéry's 1920 'charme' *The Graveyard by the Sea (Le Cimetière marin)*, which gives the film both its title and its epigram: "The wind is rising / We must try to live!" The same lines had already given the title to the Japanese poet Hori Tatsuo's 1938 novel *The Wind Has Risen*, which concerned the narrator's relationship with his fiancée in a tuberculosis sanatorium in Nagano. Hori himself suffered TB, the 'modern epidemic' – airborne, of course – which afflicted Japan in its years of industrial catch-up between the 1890s and the 1950s; he first broached this taboo subject in his 1927 poem *Illness (Yamai)*, written the year of his diagnosis:

*The tiny bird of tuberculosis  
is perched upon my bones*

*Your beak  
pecks at me  
mixing blood  
in my phlegm*

Hori is credited alongside Horikoshi as a source for Jirō at the end of *The Wind Rises*, but the gusts of cultural modernism don't rest there; Hans Castorp wanders in from the sanatorium of Thomas Mann's 1924 modernist summit *The Magic Mountain*, with its meditations on modern civilisation's appetite for destruction. And as critic Scott Foundas has noted, the film could serve as a prequel to Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, with its interplay of freedom and doom under the parabola of a V-2 rocket.

In *The Wind Rises* Jirō – now a boyishly dashing man in pastel-coloured Western suits – falls in love with Nahoko, a tubercular beauty he'd first met as a girl on the train to Tokyo in 1923, she catching his hat in the wind, he chivalrously aiding her and her nanny during the chaos of the subsequent earthquake. It's in a *Magic Mountain*-like sojourn from the darkening clouds of work and politics that they meet again, at a





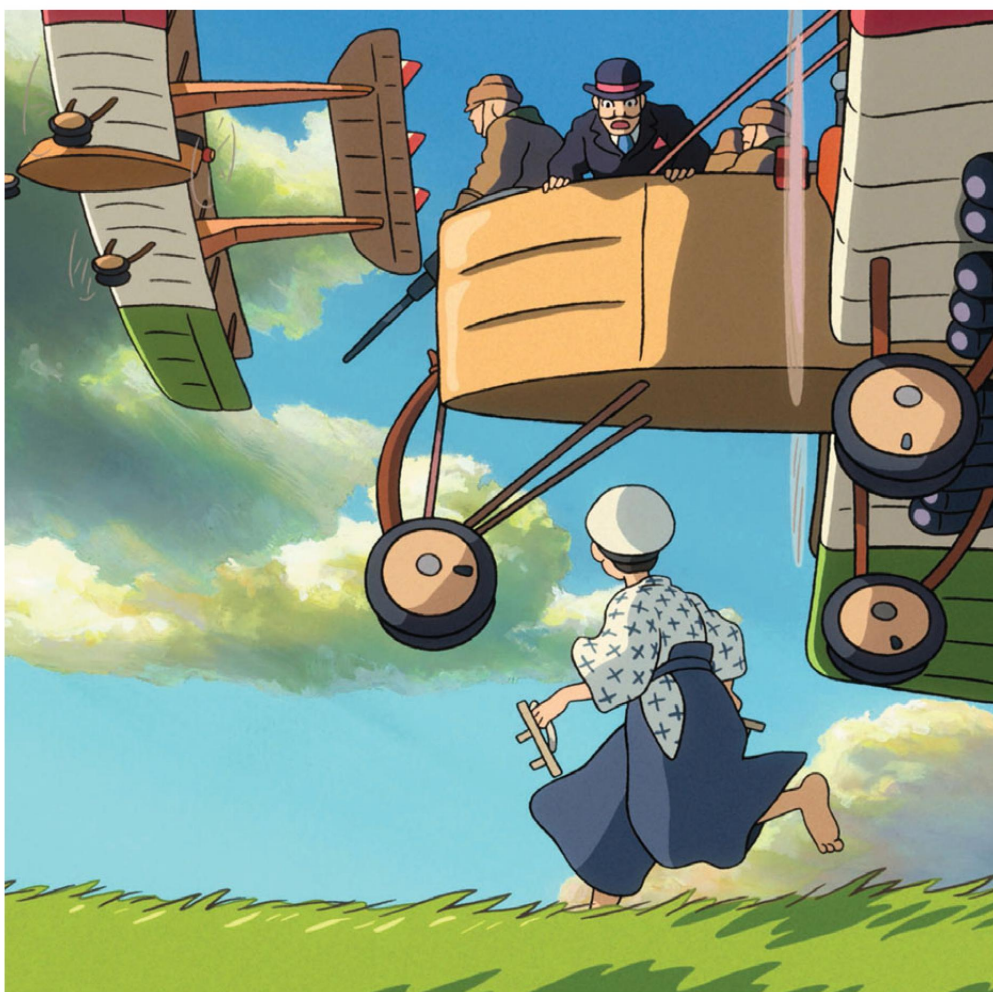
hotel retreat: Jirō catches Nahoko's parasol in the wind, and they spend an innocent morning casting paper planes. This is where Castorp comes quoting Christina Rossetti's 'Who Has Seen the Wind?', and offering the film's few words of explicit criticism of Japanese aggression: "Invade Manchuria, set up a puppet government... forget it. Make the world your enemy... forget it." The rest of Jirō and Nahoko's relationship plays out like an old-fashioned sickness melodrama, in rapidly receding time: they marry in secret (Jirō's manager is sheltering him from shadowy "thought-crime boys"), and she oscillates between his bedroom and a mountain sanatorium, but the clock is ticking on his work to help arm a country bent on *kamikaze* global offence.

Jirō is no hero; the scene in which a bedridden Nahoko lies by his desk holding his left hand while he works late into the night with his right, mastering a slide-rule one-handed to meet a deadline for military armament while letting his wife's health dwindle, is sweet, tragic and maddeningly realistic. Such a flawed identification figure makes *The Wind Rises*, again, deeply atypical for Miyazaki, whose movies are loved as much for their plucky, stirring young protagonists as for their breathtakingly beautiful hand-based animation and for Joe Hisaishi's soundtracks – both of which are richly in evidence here, offering a palpable counterpoint to the rising waste.

In *Starting Point: 1979-1996*, the first volume of his collected notes and musings, Miyazaki – animation's own William Morris – recalls his youthful misadventures trying to draw then-fashionable *gekiga*, manga magazines for grown-ups steeped in disaffection, "grudges and spite". Then he saw Yabushita Taiji and Okabe Kazuhiko's *The Tale of the White Serpent (Hakujaden)*, 1958). "It was as if the scales fell from my eyes; I realised that I should depict the honesty and goodness of children in my work... to create manga for the children of the world that said, 'Kids, don't be stifled by your parents,' and 'Become independent from your parents'... If you go out looking for something shameful or vulgar, then finding it in this society is one of the easiest things imaginable... I thought it might be better to express in an honest way that what is good is good, what is pretty is pretty, and what is beautiful is beautiful."

Might we consider *The Wind Rises* as Miyazaki's own *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988), Takahata Isao's heartbreaking *memento mori* of two orphans trying to live wild in the last months of World War II – as a historical tragedy and a reckoning, albeit one set under the shadow of adult corruption? (The one chink of hope for the future lies in the cameo character of Jirō's younger sister Kayo, a spunky and angry feminist in the vein of Miyazaki's genuine heroes.) It's clearly a film he's been building towards. "Our flighty country sways to and fro, caught in each gust of wind. If we ever dismantle our Peace Constitution, we will have nothing left," he wrote in 1991, when Japan backed US militarism in the first Gulf War. "I want to find something that can become our core principles," he continued. "I haven't figured out what that is. But I might find an entry point for the film in my hazy thoughts about how our country has not yet made a full accounting for the Second World War."

Miyazaki was born into aeroplane lore: his father Katsuji owned Miyazaki Airplane, a private company

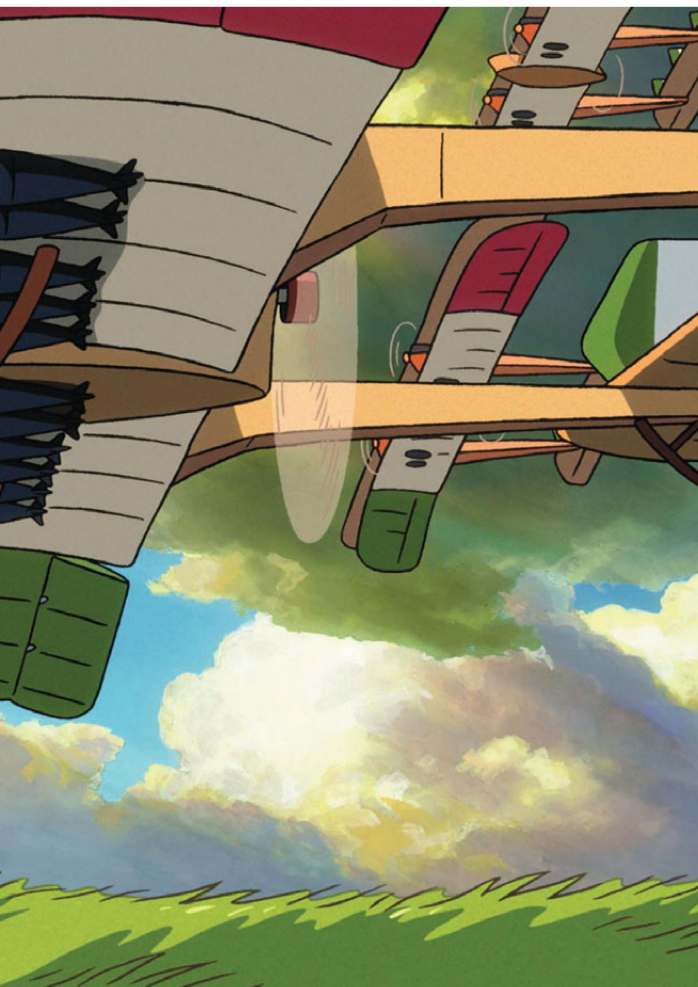


*I realised I should depict the honesty and goodness of children in my work... to create manga for the children of the world that said, 'Kids, don't be stifled by your parents'*

that manufactured rudders for Horikoshi's warplanes. Studio Ghibli is named after not just the Libyan word for the sirocco Saharan wind, but also its namesake, the Caproni Ca.309 Ghibli, a reconnaissance and ground-attack aircraft manufactured by the pioneering Milanese plane engineer Giovanni Battista Caproni, first count of Taliedo. The moustachioed Count Caproni plays a major role in *The Wind Rises*, rendezvousing in shared dreams with Jirō throughout the latter's career, often aboard Caproni's sundry inventions. It's he who recommends aeronautical engineering to the shortsighted Jirō. "But remember this, Japanese boy. Airplanes are not tools for war. They are not for making money. Airplanes are beautiful dreams." Much later he amends his account: they are "beautiful dreams, cursed dreams, waiting for the sky to swallow them up". Planes, both agree, are destined to become machines for slaughter and destruction – but neither would undo their work. When Caproni asks Jirō, "Do you prefer a world with pyramids, or with no pyramids?", Jirō chooses the former.

In 1956 the real Horikoshi published his war diaries as *Zero: The Story of Japan's Air War in the Pacific*. "When we awoke on the morning of December 8, 1941, we found ourselves – without any foreknowledge – to be embroiled in war," he wrote. "Since then, the majority of us who had truly understood the awesome industrial strength of the United States never really believed that Japan would win this war... Japan is being destroyed. I cannot do other but to blame the military hierarchy and






the blind politicians in power for dragging Japan into this hellish cauldron of defeat.”

Miyazaki’s Jirō often protests his innocent intentions. “We’re not arms merchants. We just want to build good aircraft,” he tells his friend and colleague Honjo, and says of a Junkers bomber: “Passengers could sit in the wing. It’s wasted as a bomber.” He jokes with his staff about an overburdened design: “If we leave out the guns we’ll be okay.” None of which is to say he is not culpable for the uses and abuses to which his fighters were put. Indeed, Miyazaki taxes his character with more prescience than the real Horikoshi’s diaries seem willing to bear.

Miyazaki’s compromised protagonist and his elliptical portrait of the war have incurred much criticism and controversy, not least in the context of Japan’s resurgent right-wing nationalism, and the country’s long historical absence of a state apology. Do we demand apologies of pacifists? It’s true that the film stints on showing the ravages of war, but are these not much rehearsed? Most of us can bring basic history to the table: do we blame artists for failing to preclude all misinterpretations of their work? And if we still object that Miyazaki’s one tableau of the devastation, his synecdoche for four years of carnage, shows an American bomber plane passing over the rubble of Japan’s airforce – no sign of the victims of the Zero – should we not first look closer to home at the self-turned gaze of so much of our own war cinema, little of which serves as national apologia?

At any rate, *The Wind Rises* looks beyond borders;

perhaps its underpinning myth is, finally, less that of Icarus than of Pandora and her box. “Humanity dreams of flight, but the dream is cursed,” Miyazaki’s Caproni tells Jirō. “Somewhere we have lost our mysterious prerogatives,” wrote Saint-Exupéry in 1939. Nowadays it is corporations and the super-rich who dream of weightlessness, of offshoring and escape. At the end of *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, the abandoned island fortress disappears with its robots off towards the heavens, trailing its untethered roots beneath it.

“The history of aircraft is mercilessness itself,” Miyazaki writes in his commentary for the Saint-Exupéry book. “How would the world be different if the human race could not yet fly and children still longed for the peaks of clouds? I wonder which is greater: what we gained by making airplanes or what we lost due to them?” And he signs off – in the age before drone warfare – musing on whether, “after banning land mines, we should start thinking seriously about banning the use of manned and unmanned aircraft in war”. 

**i** *The Wind Rises* is released in the UK on 9 May and is reviewed on page 93. The second volume of Miyazaki’s collected musings, *Turning Point: 1997-2008*, is reviewed on page 106. A season of Studio Ghibli films continues at London’s BFI Southbank throughout May; many are also available on DVD and Blu-ray from StudioCanal. A video essay about Miyazaki and flight will be published this month at [bfi.org.uk/sightandsound](http://bfi.org.uk/sightandsound)

**THOSE MAGNIFICENT MEN** (Clockwise from left) The young Horikoshi Jirō, hero of *The Wind Rises*, meets the airborne Milanese plane engineer Count Caproni; Jirō’s tubercular girlfriend Nahoko; Jirō witnessing the power of nature in the aftermath of the Kantō earthquake of 1923



## DRAWING ON THE PAST

Kurosawa, 'Swallows and Amazons', Russian landscape painting, Moebius, manga and his wartime childhood: Miyazaki's world is composed of an astonishing variety of elements

By Helen McCarthy

When discussing his literary and filmic influences, Miyazaki Hayao cites many fascinating sources. His respect for Kurosawa Akira is well documented, and was returned: Kurosawa regarded Miyazaki's Catbus character in *My Neighbour Totoro* as one of the finest creations in cinema. Russian animator Yuri Norstein (*Hedgehog in the Fog*) and France's Paul Grimault (*The King and the Mockingbird*) are among his favourites – he told the audience at the US premiere of *Spirited Away* that Norstein is "a great artist". And he credits Yabushita Taiji and Okabe Kazuhiko's *The Tale of the White Serpent* (*Hakuja den*, 1958) with making him look beyond manga to consider being an animator.

Miyazaki tends to present his influences in terms of narrative or morality. His love of weaving fanciful plots around linear narratives in a self-contained world owes much to his admiration for Lewis Carroll. Other favourites include Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Ursula K. Le Guin and Pyotr Pavlovich Yershov. He once told me he would love to make an animated series based on Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons*. His environmentalism, respect for traditional skills and lifestyles, and commitment to social justice are well known.

As fans and scholars we can speculate about his inspirations – and there are some fascinating possibilities inherent in the art, from the evanescent landscapes of the old Flemish masters to the dream-fables of Paul Klee – but the influences he talks about most, and the ideas that forged his line and colour, emerged from two major sources: childhood experiences and comic books.

In a lecture at a film festival in Nagoya in May 1988, he recalled a vivid picture from his childhood – the fires that coloured the night sky over the town of Utsunomiya, as his four-year-old self and his family fled the Allied firebombings. Those fires would be seen in the devastated landscapes of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and the burning fortress in *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*.

The house he fled from, a two-storey wooden building dating from the 1930s, has also influenced his other movies, from *My Neighbour Totoro* to *Spirited Away*. Miyazaki



Yamakawa Sōji's *Shonen Oja* (Boy King, 1931)



Fukushima Tetsuji's *Devil of the Desert* (1949)



Cloudsourcing: Miyazaki asked artists on *The Wind Rises* to refer to the paintings of Isaac Levitan



commented, “That house is very precious for me. The home, as well as light and shadows in the garden, has formed some part of who I am. I’d like to visit it again someday.”

Utsunomiya may have helped form his psyche but illustrations and comics in boys’ magazines were the foundation of his art. The post-war years saw young artists such as Tezuka Osamu – still a teenager when the war ended – breaking into Japanese comics with thrilling stories of fantasy, drama and science fiction. Thousands of children growing up in occupied Japan longed to be manga artists, the young Miyazaki among them. Many of the artists who emerged from that era shared an obsessive passion for replaying the conflict and remaking their shattered world through graphic narrative.

Among Miyazaki’s favourite artists were Tezuka, Yamakawa Sōji and Fukushima Tetsuji. He mentions Yamakawa’s *Shonen Oja* (*Boy King*, 1931) and Fukushima’s magazine serial *Sabaku no Mao* (*The Devil of the Desert*, 1949) as especially influential. Fukushima had absorbed the American influences flooding post-war Japan, using them as a way to move Japanese comics forward; when the latter’s work was reprinted in 2012, Miyazaki credited him with inspiring *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*’s levitation stone.

But Miyazaki soon went out of his way to reject Tezuka’s influence, destroying all his early Tezuka-based work and forcing himself to develop his own style. Joining Toei Studios, he found the environment left little room for individuality – only a

highly standardised and simplified style system enabled the production of films to a tight schedule – but the job enabled him to develop his own style of manga in his spare time, alongside his animation work.

Later, he was greatly influenced by the French writer and illustrator Jean Giraud, better known as Moebius. Andrew Lang’s illustrated Victorian fairytales and the work of Russian landscape painter Isaac Levitan also impressed him. When he was developing *The Wind Rises*, for example, Miyazaki asked his background art staff to refer to Levitan’s work, particularly in relation to his representation of clouds and light.

Miyazaki didn’t get a professional break in manga until 1969, when he was given the chance to create a promotional comic for a project he was involved in. By then he was already an established animation professional climbing the Toei career ladder, but he continued to work on his comics whenever time permitted: his epic graphic novel *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* was the source for his first original feature as a director.

Announcing his retirement in September 2013, Miyazaki said he would devote his time to “other pursuits”. Soon afterwards a TV show on NHK TV showed him drawing a samurai manga. Will he finally become the manga artist he’s always wanted to be? Or will he abandon his retirement once more – as has been hinted at on Japanese radio by his friend, the producer Suzuki Toshio – and find his way back to directing? 🍷



Andrew Lang’s *The Olive Fairy Book* (1907)

Many artists who emerged from the war years had a passion for remaking their shattered world through graphic narrative



Yuri Norstein’s animation *Hedgehog in the Fog* (1975)



Sir John Tenniel, *Alice in Wonderland* (1865)



# LESSONS FROM THE MASTER

Two of Miyazaki's long-term collaborators – supervising animation director Kosaka Kitarō and producer Suzuki Toshio – offer their insights into working with the great director. **Interviews by Nick Bradshaw**



**Nick Bradshaw:** What have you learnt about flight from working with Miyazaki?

**Kosaka Kitarō:** There is gravity and there is air; planes can fly

due to the relationship between them. How do you express the existence of gravity and air, which are invisible? That is important.

**NB:** Caproni [in *The Wind Rises*] says artists “are only creative for ten years”. To what extent does he echo Miyazaki's own feelings?

**KK:** [Miyazaki] uses that phrase quite often. I think, rather than it expressing his own thoughts, he likes it because it's a brave statement that sounds persuasive and cool. Mr Miyazaki has been in this business for over 50 years. Even if he, with this long career behind him, said, “My creative life was the ten years from this date to that date,” I wouldn't believe it!

**NB:** Miyazaki's fictional version of Horikoshi Jirō is a workaholic visionary who seems passive or fatalistic about his personal relationships and his role in history. What is your understanding of Miyazaki's relationship with his protagonist?

**KK:** Mr Miyazaki did not just reflect himself

in Horikoshi Jirō in this film. Many people reflect or portray themselves in their works. What is different about this film is that, at some point during his life, Mr Miyazaki was strongly influenced by the way Horikoshi worked. I think Mr Miyazaki's current mood, which is even more potent than this influence, is reflected in the film. And I think that Horikoshi's essence of wanting to make something beautiful was something that Mr Miyazaki got from him, and is brought to life in Mr Miyazaki's animation.

**NB:** You've worked with Miyazaki since you were 20. In what ways has he changed and in what ways has he stayed the same?

**KK:** As he has aged, he has started to feel a decrease in strength and power of concentration and he seems friendlier to other people now. He used to be exclusively devoted to his work but now he's involved in the local community and even in

*The great animators are all twice as obsessive and persistent about their own fixations as ordinary people*

daily activities to keep the river clean.

However, his attitude to work, with his childish innocence, has not changed. He still makes his own sound effects as he draws – “hiss... roar...” – and is influenced by them. His manner of talking to his staff using comical gestures is still the same as it always was.

**NB:** You've worked with other great animators, from Takahata Isao to Otomo Katsuhiro. Can you tell us a bit about how they differ and what they have in common as animation directors?

**KK:** Say you have an object. Mr Takahata will look at it from the bird's-eye point of view. Mr Otomo will look out of the corner of his eye. Mr Miyazaki will put his face right up to it. They're all twice as obsessive and persistent about their own fixations as ordinary people.

**NB:** What is your greatest philosophical disagreement with Miyazaki?

**KK:** Animation is a collaborative work. If there is cognitive dissonance, it is not possible to produce high-quality work. When we are working, our first priority is to make a good film and any elements that inhibit this have to be put aside.

**NB:** Can you persuade him not to retire?

**KK:** I don't think even the emperor would be able to do that! ☹



**NB:** Most studio producers would be thrilled to be offered a sequel by their star director. Why did you persuade Miyazaki Hayao to

make *The Wind Rises* instead of *Ponyo* 2?

**Suzuki Toshio:** I have absolutely no interest in sequels. I am interested in new themes. If not, I have no motivation. I thought this was going to be Miyazaki Hayao's last film so I proposed he make *The Wind Rises*. I thought he should make a film on the subject of war. This was because I knew he was very knowledgeable about war and weapons. I thought he would regret it later on if he didn't. He thought about it a lot before making the decision.

**NB:** How do you understand Miyazaki's relationship with Horikoshi Jirō?

**ST:** At the beginning of the war, being vocal about your opposition to it could get you sent straight to prison. What you might call the ordinary people had no choice but to toil away at

the work at hand. This was what ordinary citizens did and Horikoshi was one of these ordinary Japanese citizens. Mr Miyazaki chose Horikoshi as his main protagonist with the thought in mind that Miyazaki himself would have had no choice but to do the same thing as everyone else in that situation.

**NB:** The film is in many ways Miyazaki's most realistic, and yet it is set in his father's era, in the years immediately before Hayao was born. Did he discuss any feelings about honouring or accurately rendering the details of this bygone world?

**ST:** Miyazaki loves the landscape of the Japan of days gone by but this is not the only reason. In depicting the era in which his own father lived in its entirety, maybe he wanted to understand his father to a certain extent.

**NB:** Have you been surprised by any of the controversies the film has sparked?

**ST:** It is a film that I knew might be misunderstood before we started making it, so I was not surprised.

**NB:** How has success changed Miyazaki?

**ST:** One of his great characteristics is that he did not change his living standards even after he became successful. I watched him do this and thought it was really surprising.

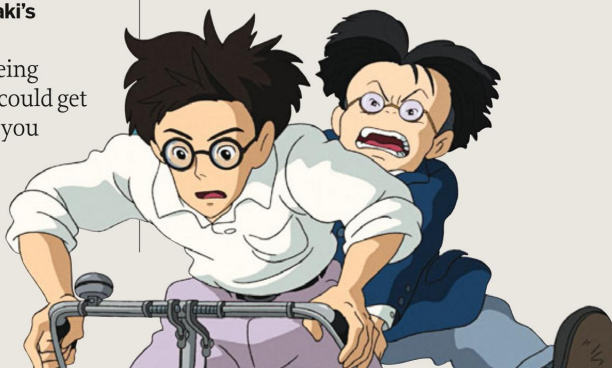
**NB:** Supposing you've now found younger talent to entrust with the future of Studio Ghibli: can you speculate on how their films might differ from Miyazaki's and Takahata's?

**ST:** The era creates the works and the works create the era. That is what I believe and all I am doing is keeping a close eye on that.

**NB:** Are you a betting man? What would you stake on Miyazaki staying retired this time?

**ST:** I love gambling. But I only ever bet on films. It is really nothing to do with me if Miyazaki comes out of retirement or if he stays retired, although I do have a responsibility as it was me who was beside him at the press conference announcing his retirement. So, if he decided to come out of retirement, I guess I would be against it. ☹

*The Wind Rises*





# THE KING IS DEAD

Now that Miyazaki has announced his retirement, where are the Japanese animators who can carry on in the same tradition – and where are the ones who can start something new?

By Jasper Sharp

“My era of animation is over,” proclaimed Miyazaki Hayao, announcing his retirement at the Venice Film Festival last summer. Miyazaki has been part of Japan’s animation industry almost as long as it has existed, having joined Toei Animation shortly after its establishment in 1956. A generation worldwide has grown up with his morally complex fables, rendered using a classical pen-and-ink approach that harks back to an era of hands-on craftsmanship all but abandoned elsewhere. But where is the talent ready to assume his mantle?

The obvious place to look is within Studio Ghibli itself. An unfortunate effect of Miyazaki’s prominence has been the eclipsing of his stablemate – notably his friend and studio co-founder Takahata Isao, director of *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988) and *Only Yesterday* (1991). Last year Japanese critics judged *The Tale of Princess Kaguya*, based on a tenth-century folk story and his first film since *My Neighbors the Yamadas* (1999), far superior to Miyazaki’s swansong; and he has always been more interested than Miyazaki in graphical experimentation. At six years older than Miyazaki, though, Takahata hardly represents a future. And given Ghibli’s intermittent output and adherence to in-house style – tendencies epitomised by Miyazaki’s own son Goro (*Tales from Earthsea*, 2006, and *From up on Poppy Hill*, 2011) – is it likely to produce Japan’s next animation ‘auteur’?

Miyazaki and Takahata have drawn a line between the company’s own exquisite theatrical releases and mass-market anime product aimed at television or DVD. Others have been less worried by this characteristically Japanese aesthetic. Oshii Mamoru, whose *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (2004) was the first Japanese animation to play in competition at Cannes, and the late Kon Satoshi, director of the psycho-thriller *Perfect Blue* (1998), both specialised in vivid evocations of worlds in which boundaries between real and virtual are blurred.

Madhouse, the studio that produced Kon’s four features, has also played host to the current pretender to Miyazaki’s crown, Hosoda Mamoru. He began on more kids-oriented fare such as the *Digimon* television



There will be bud: Yamamura Koji’s Academy Award-nominated *Mt. Head* (2002)

series and spin-off films, and at one point was set to direct *Howl’s Moving Castle* at Ghibli, until Miyazaki stepped in. He gained attention with *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time* (2006), based on Tsutsui Yasutaka’s novel about a time-travelling high-school student, but hit his stride with *Summer Wars* (2009), in which a schoolboy maths prodigy locks horns with a malevolent artificial intelligence – putting a more universal, almost Ghibli-esque, spin on a quintessential anime plot. His more commercially successful *Wolf Children* (2013), about a mother moving to the countryside to raise her two werewolf offspring, demonstrated a similar deft balancing of the fantastical and the personal.

Hara Keiichi emerged from the relative anonymity of directing kids’ TV staples *Doraemon* and *Crayon Shin-chan* with the aptly titled *Colourful* (2010), about a disembodied soul offered a chance to make amends for earthly sins by returning to act as guardian to a 14-year-old boy – a sublime example

*Given Ghibli’s sparse output and adherence to in-house style is it likely to produce Japan’s next animation ‘auteur’?*



Hosoda Mamoru’s *Wolf Children* (2012)

of animation’s ability to transcend physical reality intelligently and poignantly.

But perhaps a similar freshness, singularity of vision and mastery of style will be found outside the studio system. A new generation of indie animators is spearheaded by Yamamura Koji, whose mordantly witty works include the Academy Award-nominated *Mt. Head* (2002), in which a tree growing out of a stingy old man’s head foreshadows his descent into insanity. *Muybridge’s Strings* (2011), realised with the National Film Board of Canada, tried – according to the director – to “encapsulate the whole of time and space” in ten minutes.

Wada Atsushi, who won a Silver Bear at the 2012 Berlin Film Festival for his short *The Great Rabbit*, also rejects the cutesiness characteristic of Japanese animation. The raw sketch approach and oblique humour of *Day of Nose* (2005) and *In a Pig’s Eye* (2010) complement the films’ nonsensical (non-) narratives. His contemporary Mizue Mirai eschews realistic representation altogether, with the pulsing Paisley patterns of *Fantastic Cell* (2003) and *Lost Utopia* (2007) or the geometric forms of *Metropolis* (2009) and *Modern* (2010) echoing the pure abstraction of Miró and Kandinsky. The eight-minute *Wonder* (2014), accumulated from a year’s worth of his own daily one-second animated doodles, premiered at Berlin in February.

While their ambitions are smaller and their scope less expansive than Miyazaki’s, these steadfastly uncommercial, solitary mould-breakers, stepping beyond the realms of realism, may best represent the new visionaries of Japanese animation. **S**

**i** An interview with Mizue Mirai will be published this month at [bfi.org.uk/sightandsound](http://bfi.org.uk/sightandsound)



# THE OLD AND THE NEW

Jia Zhangke's Cannes prizewinner 'A Touch of Sin' brings a touch of genre film-making to a daring anatomy of violence in present-day China

By Tony Rayns

**We can't hail** *A Touch of Sin* as Jia Zhangke's return to fiction filmmaking because it's based on four real-life violent incidents in China's recent past, but it is his first fully scripted and acted film since *Still Life* in 2006. He's been busy making documentaries/docudramas and producing films for other directors in the last eight years – so this definitely represents a return to the fray, happily crowned with the screenplay prize in Cannes. His realist approach has embraced elements of fantasy since *The World* (2004), but here for the first time his style is inflected with memories of genre movies: King Hu's martial-arts films mostly, but also John Woo crime procedurals and Sergio Leone westerns.

The four incidents became widely known in China not through 'official' media but via internet postings on the Weibo website. Jia hasn't slavishly followed the facts of each case, but stays close enough to make sure that his Chinese audience will recognise his sources. He frames the film with the rapacious expansion of the fictional Shengli Corporation ('Shengli' means 'Victory'): in the first episode it has taken over a formerly state-owned mine, and in the coda it is running a big soft-drink bottling plant. The clear implication is that China's neo-capitalists have replaced communist officials as controllers of people's fates; the film's Chinese title *Tian Zhuding* translates as 'ill-fated'.

The first episode, 'Black Gold Mountain', centres on Dahai (Jiang Wu, younger brother of Jiang Wen), an unmarried diabetic who resents and challenges the escalating wealth gap in his village in Shanxi. He particularly objects to the way that Shengli has







**LOVE FOR SALE**  
Women dress up for the wealthy customers at Golden Age, a high-end nightclub cum brothel in *A Touch of Sin*





*My aim is to emphasise the inevitable but hidden connections between people rather than the randomness of our encounters*

reneged on its promises to share profits from the privatised mine with local workers, but his protests are blocked at every turn. The second episode, 'Shapingba' (it's the name of a village near Chongqing), centres on Zhou San (Wang Baoqiang), a ruthless killer and thief who returns to his abandoned wife and son for New Year. The third episode, 'Nightcomer Sauna', centres on Zheng Xiaoyu (Zhao Tao, Jia's wife), who works as a sex-sauna receptionist while waiting for her married lover to leave his wife; she becomes the target of an abusive customer. And the fourth episode, 'Oasis of Prosperity', centres on Xiaohui (newcomer Luo Lanshan), a teenager who has come south in search of decent wages in the factories – and then the brothels – of Guangdong.

The four stories intersect only marginally, but add up to a very plausible 'state of the nation' report, shot through with Jia's characteristic wit and melancholy.

**Tony Rayns:** Is it true that you found the stories used in the film on the Weibo website? Do you use Weibo a lot? What impact has Weibo had in China?

**Jia Zhangke:** Weibo is the Chinese equivalent of Twitter, and I began using it nearly three years ago. Before Weibo came along, we had to rely on the state media for news and for hearing different points of view – and censorship generally blocked both. Weibo cleared those blockages very quickly. In the last three years many events in China have been first reported on Weibo, and the traditional state media have had no choice but to catch up and discuss them.

The news stories which inspired the third and fourth

episodes in *A Touch of Sin* became known through Weibo. The first and second episodes were based on things that happened before Weibo started, but Weibo brought us much more detail about them – for example, the court transcripts from the trial of the prototype for Dahai in the first episode – and I often found that detail shocking. When I started thinking about the film, I had to decide whether to base it on just one event or on a bunch of events involving different people; I finally settled on four stories with different protagonists.

Since Weibo started, the way we feel the world has changed. I check Weibo at least twice a day, in the morning and evening. When I do so, I can scan both local and global news in one sweep. Local news used to be purely local, but in the social networking age any local event can become a national or even global event. We now learn a huge amount very quickly – that's perhaps the way we relate to the world, thanks to the internet – so that's why I decided to go with the four stories and four protagonists. I hope that *A Touch of Sin* shows some kind of inspiration from the internet. But I also hope that it differs from other 'anthology' films which weave the lives of disparate people into one story. My aim is to emphasise the inevitable but hidden connections between people rather than the randomness of our encounters. The world evolves constantly, and I hope that *A Touch of Sin* can show that.

**TR:** The four stories you chose span the country from north to south and back again, but avoid the biggest cities, Beijing and Shanghai. Any reason for that?

**JZ:** I've long wanted to make a film ranging across China from the north to the south. One reason is that it's a way of showing the country's regional differences, from the relatively closed and economically backward areas in the north to the 'open' coastal areas in the south. But another reason is that I wanted to show characters who travel. Since the country's 'urbanisation' policy was brought in, more than two decades ago, many Chinese have become economic migrants, leaving their homes to look for greater prosperity. Moving frequently has become a fact of life for many. At the same time, I've always liked the way that our ancient painters aimed to represent the whole country within a single scroll-painting. I haven't really thought about why I left Beijing and Shanghai out of the picture. Maybe it's because those cities have tended to dominate China's screen and I wanted to take my camera to inland areas which are more in need of development. Those are the areas where I feel most at home, the lands surrounded by mountains and rivers.

**TR:** You must have been spoilt for choice, so can you say why you went for these particular stories?

**JZ:** I was guided by my wish to explore violence from different angles. The first story takes place in Shanxi Province, and it shows violence which arises from social issues – such as the growing gap between rich and poor, social injustices, the problems of getting legal recourse and blockages in communication between the grass roots and the centre. These issues build up and finally cause Dahai to turn to violence. The second story is set in Sichuan Province in the south-west, not far from Chongqing, and it's about a professional killer who targets innocent people. Here, I'm focusing on psychological issues. In one sense, Zhou San is typical of the young people who migrate from village homes in the west to the rich east coast, or from the 'backward' north to the prosper-

PHOTOGRAPH BY FILIP VAN ROOYEVINE



ous south; he's fighting against the mediocrity of his life. What's most shocking, of course, is the collateral damage.

The third story takes place in Hubei Province, in central China. It centres on the issue of dignity: violence arises because one person doesn't respect another's dignity. The need to restore her lost dignity is what provokes Xiaoyu to strike out: the victim of violence becomes a perpetrator of violence. The fourth story takes place in Guangdong Province in the south, partly in the foreign-owned factories of Dongguan, and it centres on my understanding that 'violence' takes many forms. The boy Xiaohui is expected to work for ten hours on an assembly line and is forbidden to speak to his workmates; that's a kind of violence. And there's another kind in the way his mother back home in the village keeps calling him to demand more of his wages; he can't even control his own income. In the last few years, a dozen or more kids like Xiaohui have met similar fates in the south, and their deaths made a deep impression on me.

In making my final choice of stories I also took into account the ages of the characters. I liked going from the middle-aged characters of the first story to the teenagers of the last. I'd flirted with the idea of including an episode based on an incident which happened near Xi'an. A college kid from a wealthy family was driving and hit a pregnant woman; he'd been taught that "the poor always bring trouble", so he got out of the car, killed the woman and fled. I finally decided that Xiaohui's experience on assembly lines made him a more representative teenager than that young murderer. Also, I wanted the film's stories to resonate with each other. When we see Xiaohui in the south, we can think back to the second story and get a sense of what the boy is trying to escape from.

**TR:** Three of your protagonists this time are played by very well-known actors: Jiang Wu, Wang Baoqiang and, of course, Zhao Tao. Are you turning away from your earlier preference for little-known actors and non-professionals?

**JZ:** When I first came across those news stories, I didn't immediately see any way to use them in a film. Then, quite suddenly, I made the connection between the news stories and the classical novel *Shui Hu Chuan* [translated as both *The Water Margin* and *Outlaws of the Marsh*], which is about a peasant uprising in the Song Dynasty. At a time of social unrest, all of the book's 108 main characters face a battle for survival which drives them to violent resistance. And then I also made the connection with King Hu's movies, such as *Dragon Gate Inn* [1966] and *A Touch of Zen* [1969]. Parallels between the contemporary news stories and classical martial-arts novels and movies suddenly seemed very obvious to me. That was a primary inspiration; I thought I could apply some of the conventions of martial-arts fiction to the telling of these present-day stories. It made me a bit sad to realise how slowly we progress; stories about the fates of Chinese people hundreds of years ago still resonate today.

The characters in *A Touch of Sin* lead normal, everyday lives, but are driven to acts of violence for various reasons. I realised I needed actors who could handle both the everyday scenes and the heightened intensity of the violent scenes, which spring from conflicts and confrontations. (Zhao Tao's part is even a bit surreal.) That's why I turned to professional actors this time. While writing the script, I already knew that Jiang Wu should play Dahai, Wang Baoqiang should play Zhou San and Zhao



**SHOCK TO THE SYSTEM**  
Jiang Wu (above) plays Dahai, a man who challenges the growing gap between rich and poor in his village in Shanxi Province in *A Touch of Sin*, directed by Jia Zhangke (above left)

Tao should play Xiaoyu. I think the casting choices help cement the connection with classical martial-arts fiction.

**TR:** Why did you choose Han Dong for the cameo as the brothel customer in the fourth story?

**JZ:** Han Dong is my favourite Chinese writer; his novels present the absurdity of everyday life with great wit and profundity. He's helping me with the script for another film. In writing the brothel scene, I felt that the customer should be somehow redolent of the past, something of a gentle intellectual. So I immediately thought of inviting Han Dong to play him.

**TR:** The film is mostly shot on location, but how about interiors such as the sex sauna in Yichang and the nightclub-brothel in Dongguan? Did you find them or build them? How much do you think about production design these days?

**JZ:** Yes, the film is almost entirely location-shot. I spent a lot of time location-hunting; since locations often inspire me, I tend to modify the script as I go around. For example, in Hubei I found some cliffs at Shennongjia which reminded me of the studio landscapes you see in many old Shaw Brothers movies made in Hong Kong. I joked with my cinematographer Yu Lik-Wai that we'd move the old Shaw landscape into the real world. The ancient painter Shi Tao wrote that his work was to "seek out the sublime mountains and sketch drafts" and I found myself understanding his words better; I also need to find 'emotion-rich' locations which can fire my imagination.

But we did need to design and build the interiors for the sex sauna and the brothel in the studio. We built those sets in a studio at Datong in Shanxi. 





**✦** I needed the studio for those scenes to give us a comfortable working environment in which we could position the camera where we needed to, and to control the colour. For example, in the room in which Xiaoyu kills the guy, I couldn't shake the feeling that there should be green, tropical-plant wallpaper, and I asked the art director to find me some. I couldn't rationalise why until I realised that it was to do with the fact that Xiaoyu worked previously in Guangzhou in the south. That green, tropical wallpaper seemed to connect the third and fourth stories.

**TR:** I've seen that you spend a lot of time and energy on editing, and it seems to me that you've become more interested in what we can call the 'musicality' of film language: the style, the rhythm, particular conjunctions of image and sound. Do you feel your approach has changed over the years?

**JZ:** When I made *Xiao Wu* [*Pickpocket*] 15 years ago, I wanted a 'realistic' *mise-en-scène*. A lot of that film was shot hand-held; there was a highly interactive relationship between the actors and the camera, which produced a feeling of immediacy. In *A Touch of Sin*, I was going for the feeling of traditional Chinese murals. If you go to a Chinese temple, you'll find that our ancestors often represented big historical events across four large murals. Taken together, the murals not only capture the expressions of the people caught up in the events but also go beyond a simple, causal explanation of whatever was happening. Even though *A Touch of Sin* is based on recent news stories, I hope that our images have a slightly abstract edge to them. The element of abstraction gives the viewer more room for imagination, and that's the best way to keep the viewer's connection to the movie strong. We used Steadicam a lot this time, hoping to give the film a 'fluttering' style and a mysterious sense of movement. For me, this is an equivalent of the smooth lines of an old Chinese mural. I'm not sure if this represents an 'evolution' in my film language, and I didn't think of it that way. But I'm always thinking about film form, and looking for ways to match the technique to the ideas.

**TR:** What's happened to your martial-arts project *In the Qing Dynasty*? Has it somehow fed in to *A Touch of Sin*, which contains several references to King Hu's films?

**JZ:** I very much like King Hu's movies; I watched several of them in video halls in my junior-high-school days,

**BUSINESS AS USUAL**  
*A Touch of Sin* stars Luo Lanshan (above) as Xiaohui, a teenager oppressed by the gruelling conditions at his factory, and Zhao Tao as Zheng Xiaoyu (below), a sex-sauna receptionist who becomes the target of an abusive customer

*Even though 'A Touch of Sin' is based on news stories, I hope our images have a slightly abstract edge. It gives the viewer more room for imagination*

and watched them again when I began preparing *In the Qing Dynasty* some years ago. I think his cinema is essentially political. Films like *Dragon Gate Inn* and *A Touch of Zen* are about individuals caught up in political disturbances at times of great social change. His characters are generally in some kind of exile, fated to suffer or enact revenge. King Hu made his best films in the 1960s and 1970s, while the Cultural Revolution was in progress in China and nearly all Chinese were caught up in politics. King Hu was born, raised and educated in the mainland, and even if he was working in Hong Kong or Taiwan, I'm sure he was affected by what was going on in China. I can see it in his films. The essence of a martial-arts film is a story of rebellion against a social order or against social taboos. *A Touch of Sin* reflects real-life violence. I believe that violence can be eliminated only by understanding its causes. I don't support violence, but I respect people with a rebellious spirit. I hope that *In the Qing Dynasty* will be my next film. We've completed the production design and are now talking with actors.

**TR:** We've heard that the Film Bureau passed *A Touch of Sin* for distribution in China, but the film has in fact not been distributed. Can you give us an update?

**JZ:** The Film Bureau passed *A Touch of Sin* in April 2013, just before we took the film to Cannes. We planned to open the film in China in November 2013. But in October officials started worrying that the film might provoke social unrest, and so the opening was postponed. China has no film classification system, and fears were raised that the violence in the film could influence viewers. All I could do was patiently negotiate with the Film Bureau. To make matters worse, in March 2014 a pirated copy of the film appeared on the internet in China and on underground DVDs. More than 30,000 people have already posted comments on the film on a Chinese film website. Not surprisingly, the Chinese distributor is very frustrated. Now all we can do is wait. **📞**

**i** Tony Rayns helped Jia Zhangke with the subtitles for *A Touch of Sin* and will interview him onstage at BFI Southbank, London, on 8 May. The film is released in UK cinemas on 16 May. *Platform* and *Still Life* are screening as part of the BFI's 'Electric Shadows' season of Chinese cinema, which runs from June to September at BFI Southbank





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# GRAND ILLUSIONS CINEMA OF THE GREAT WAR

*Simplistic politics; racial clichés; an over-reliance on chivalry, heroism and romance; and an apparent reluctance to capture the true terror in the stricken gaze of its soldiers – have the films addressing the slaughter of World War I done justice to the enormity of the tale being told?*

**By David Thomson**

With artillery and shrapnel in dominant form, it would be a war of helmets, and so black-and-white movies had easy identifiers. I found a letter on the net from 2012 that spoke to this legacy: “It’s humbling to admit this, but I’m a 28-year-old U.S. resident and know very, very little about World War I. I have the sketchiest of sketches. I know it was fought in the early 1900s, and involved people with pointy helmets, but not much more than that.”

This comment was a response to *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), still the epitome of that war, and unrivalled as a sympathetic portrait of an enemy. Erich Maria Remarque had been wounded in 1917 fighting for the German army. Eleven years later, he wrote *Im Westen nichts neues* (literally, ‘Nothing new in the West’), about idealistic young Germans crushed by war. The novel was serialised in late 1928 and published as a book the next year. A million and a half copies sold in a few months, and in English it became *All Quiet on the Western Front*, a title that is warning and hope. Not everyone hailed the book. The Nazi party condemned it; as soon as they had the chance they burned it for its defeatist views.

The book was purchased by Carl Laemmle at Universal (the studio with the strongest German ties). Maxwell Anderson and George Abbott worked on the script, Lewis Milestone directed, George Cukor helped with the dialogue and Lew Ayres played the German soldier who is killed in the trenches as he reaches out



BEI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (1)

**DOOMED YOUTH**  
King Vidor's *The Big Parade* (1925) emerged out of the director's frustration with making 'ephemeral' films and proved a massive hit for MGM









**SPOILS OF WAR**  
(Clockwise from top left) Lew Ayres in Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), Gary Cooper and Helen Hayes in Frank Borzage's *A Farewell to Arms* (1932), and Kirk Douglas in Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957)



for a butterfly. (That shot was an afterthought. The cast had dispersed, so the hand is Milestone's.) Released in 1930, it played at two and a half hours, and won the Oscar for best picture. The title passed into folklore, and *All Quiet's* pessimism may have fostered the appeasement that fed the Nazis.

### LOST CAUSES

It is the hardest war to explain, and the first universal loss of peace that defied any process of causation. So A.J.P. Taylor allowed that while there might have been tectonic pressures for war in 1914, it was enough on the day to look at patterns of mobilisation and the train timetables. War was ridiculous but unstoppable; its slaughter made idiots of us all. Twenty years later, by contrast, the second war had sturdy imperatives. It was a just war, a necessary war, fought to save mankind and overcome evil; it was even the belated tidying of all the grievances left in 1918.

The Great War was a mystery, and a disaster all the greater because it seems feckless and incidental. Without evident evil at its core, any hope for virtue was ruined. So sometimes movies and novels reached out for coincidence and chance to place the war. In Stefan Zweig's novel *Beware of Pity* (1939), Edith von Kekesfalva, the dreadful, clinging, crippled fiancée, kills herself when Anton Hofmiller, the woefully weak cavalry officer caught in the tangle of his neurotic subservience to her, cannot get a cable through to allay the latest of her endless anxieties. The lines are jammed because that same day, 28 June, in Sarajevo, a rather inept terrorist has had a second chance and the world is abuzz with the news. After one bomb blew up under the wrong vehicle, Gavrilo Princip happened to see the royal car halted on a back street. He jumped on the running board and shot the archduke and his wife, Countess Sophie Chotek.

Those murdered lovers are also John Lodge and Edwige Feuillère in Max Ophüls's *De Mayerling à Sarajevo* (1940). In E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*, a clairvoyant child tells Harry Houdini, escapologist, "Warn the Duke", as if the calamity might be prevented. The novel's Houdini does meet the doomed couple, but he cannot change history, and the archduke, half asleep, doesn't seem to know who Houdini is. Such tiny mischances, so many millions buried. In 1920, in Tavernier's *Life and Nothing But* (1989), an officer (Philippe Noiret) is still trying to identify remains of the 350,000 missing Frenchmen.

Jean Renoir had served in the war and been wounded; Octave has his limp in *La Règle du jeu* (1939). In *La Grande Illusion* (1937), he had outlined the fatuous and concocted hostility within an officer class full of mutual respect. That film pointed gently towards the war as a class affair in which the classes could barely identify their needs beneath the veneer of chivalry. People said *La Grande Illusion* was a profound study in irony – it was even nominated for the best picture Oscar! So, respectful of irony, the world waited patiently for two years before breaking out in fresh war.

In the recent TV version of Ford Madox Ford's Tietjens novels, *Parade's End*, we see how people put their own affairs of love and betrayal above the infinite problems of grand strategy. It is their last chance of being human. Tietjens is an awkward man, helpless in love and romance, frequently misunderstood, but in the chaos of the front he is a decent officer, someone the men respect. He is like



the officer (Dirk Bogarde) in Losey's *King & Country* (1964) who will dispatch the wretched Private Hamp (Tom Courtenay) when the firing squad has bungled the job.

Hamp had volunteered and made it as far as Passchendaele in 1917. He was the only soldier left from his original company. We would say now that he was stressed, or shell-shocked. Anyway, he took a walk and is treated as a deserter. It is reckoned that 306 British deserters were executed – but they have been pardoned since. Has the French nation extended the same relief to the originals of the men executed in *Paths of Glory* (1957)? That film grew out of Kubrick's memories of reading Humphrey Cobb's 1935 novel about the selection of scapegoats for one of those failed infantry assaults in the teeth of machine-gun fire that are also set pieces for youthful moviemaking. We honour that film for Kubrick's tracking shots, the smug evil of Adolphe Menjou and George Macready as commanding officers, and the I-am-Spartacus boldness of Kirk Douglas's Colonel Dax. *Paths of Glory* shines with Kubrick's scorn for the chances of humanity, though it was Douglas who insisted that Kubrick stay loyal to the book's merciless ending. But has there ever been a movie director who can handle battle without some sultry glamour creeping in?

### VISIONS OF DEATH

My orders were simple and not much more encouraging than those given to Dax: in 3,500 words, round up the usual and unusual suspects of films made about World War I. What about John Mills as Brown on Resolution island delaying the German battleship, in Walter Forde's *Forever England* (AKA *Born for Glory*, 1935)? Or there is a movie from Zweig's *Beware of Pity*, done in Britain in 1946, directed by Maurice Elvey, with Albert Lieven as the young officer and Lilli Palmer as Edith. I've only ever seen ten minutes of it on YouTube – the rest seems blown away in some blast, so I don't know how it handles 28 June 1914.

In Christopher Hampton's *Carrington* (1995) do I recall or am I imagining Lytton Strachey and Dora C. on the Sussex cliffs and hearing artillery in France? In the film of *Mrs Dalloway* (1997), Rupert Graves plays Septimus Smith, the broken victim of shell-shock. You don't think of Virginia Woolf as a war novelist, but Smith (for 1925) is a remarkable study in trauma. In 1941, Woolf and her husband Leonard in their cottage outside Lewes kept cyanide tablets in case of German invasion. Was it those tablets that weighed down her pockets or stones from the River Ouse?

In the *Guardian* recently, the historian Margaret MacMillan (*The War that Ended Peace: The Road to 1914*) proposed that artists before 1914 may have "felt a catastrophe was bearing down on them and their societies". Who wondered what when? This could be a case of the *Guardian* encouraging a leading academic to speculate. And I'm not sure that 'catastrophe' covers it. Try it this way: the Great War was a disaster of order – people did as they were told to the point of annihilation. But vast reordering was at work beyond the power of artillery. The Great War forced the most influential revolution of the century. It saw the enactment of machinery as power. It extended voting rights to women, but began to suggest the vote was redundant. In that light, the gleeful air of anarchy in the Feuillade films (many made during the war) and

*Has there ever been a movie director who can handle battle without some sultry glamour creeping in?*

Lang's Dr. Mabuse pictures are more suggestive than, say, *The Big Parade*. Joyce's story 'The Dead' was published in 1914, before the author knew about war, but its snowfall of death is so prescient. *The Rite of Spring* opened in Paris in 1913. Kafka wrote *Metamorphosis* in 1912, publishing it three years later. Picasso and Braque had reimagined the appearance of life as if in the second after a bomb. Apollinaire, wounded in the head in combat, did his *Calligrammes* in which the look of poetry visualised explosions on the page. He said he had been inspired by cinema. This history says as much about the loss of civic faith and the prospect of a brave new disorder as the gravitas of Erich Maria Remarque or the cultural overcast that believes the Great War was a Very Bad Thing and wears plastic poppies in November. The war was cubism, jazz and *Un chien Andalou* (1929), too.

Get anywhere in war and you risk losing control. When Losey shot *King & Country*, the horror surprised him: "That was a monstrous film to shoot because the stage was deep in mud, we brought these rats in, they got loose and the place really stunk like the trenches. We were working under artificial rain in Mackintoshes and boots, and by the time we were finished with our 18 days in the place, we really felt as though we'd been in the trenches."

No one is alive now who knew the real trenches, but I had a beloved father-in-law who had been there several years and he wouldn't really talk about it, perhaps because the polite world of 1918 could not hear the truth. I think you need to have awoken in the mud dawn after dawn and felt the body next to you and wondered if it was alive or dead. I recall when the Imperial War Museum installed its persuasive and scarily beautiful trench set, with soundtrack. That was education (without the stink of decay), but the designers stopped short – when you came out of the museum and had to run for the tube station in the rain there was no artillery barrage.

### IN LOVE AND WAR

So many Great War films seem like ghosts from a 19th-century twilight. Rex Ingram's *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1920) ends in a sunlit meadow filled with white crosses, but the film is encrusted with chivalry, coincidence and romance. Still, it's a more responsible view than D.W. Griffith offered in *Hearts of the* 





World (1918), which is proof of how reactionary a spirit that innovator possessed and of how little he grasped of the war even if he went to France for some of the shooting. King Vidor's *The Big Parade* (1925) was too full of its ambitious enterprise to notice more than spectacle and scenario. Vidor had told MGM's Irving Thalberg he was frustrated making "ephemeral" films. He wanted a more enduring impact. "What are you thinking?" asked Thalberg. Vidor answered, "Steel, wheat or war," and the boy wonder chose war. He got a screenwriter, Laurence Stallings, who had lost a leg in combat. The picture was an enormous hit, but its notion of battlefield deployment bowed to the love story between John Gilbert and Renée Adorée. It was one of the first films on which the logistics of production smothered the untidiness of conflict:

"Near the end of the picture," wrote Vidor, "I sent one of my assistants to Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas, to stage some scenes which would expand the general movement from behind the line up to the front. We wanted 200 trucks, 3 to 4,000 men, 100 airplanes, and any other equipment they would let us use. I told him to move the trucks in an absolutely straight line away from the camera, down a hillside, across a valley, and into the horizon. I gave him the placement for five cameras and instructed him to have all the planes fly over at the precise moment in the action."

Abel Gance had served briefly in the army and been invalidated out. But he had conceived *J'accuse* (1918) before the end of hostilities and got Charles Pathé to fund it. He was at the front in September 1918 filming battle footage that he would cut in to his story. One never knows for sure about such stories: to get the best light and the eloquent framing, film crews are inclined to skirt peril. They don't risk desertion charges. But *J'accuse* is hysterically heartfelt: dead soldiers rise from their graves to denounce the decision for war and the damage it has done to France. For that sequence Gance hired soldiers who had been in war and who returned to combat afterwards. "They played the dead knowing that in all probability they'd be dead themselves before long. Within a few weeks of their return 80 per cent had been killed." Was that exactly so? Or was it what Gance believed and what he knew would sell the film? Being anti-war but pro-film can be an awkward position to maintain.

All too often, the abyss of the war had crossed love stories in which a family found itself on opposite sides. That was not unreasonable: after all, George V, the Kaiser and the Tsar were cousins. In *The Little American* (1917), Mary Pickford is competed for by German and French soldiers. Love's confusion works in *J'accuse*, and *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* has an Argentinian family taking different sides. In Rowland V. Lee's *Barbed Wire* (1927), Pola Negri is a French girl in love with Clive Brook's German prisoner-of-war. In Ford's *Four Sons* (1928) – his earliest treatment of war, and what he judged his first good script – a German family is kept alive through the son who went to America.

Amid the mothballs of such films, the achievement of *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) becomes all the clearer. To be sure this is a film in which a woman keeps men alert, but the cause – in 1943 – is German-British friendship, Clive and Theo, Roger Livesey and Anton Walbrook. This never turns into melodrama. The modesty of the daring is as lovely as the Technicolor blush

*They played the dead in 'J'accuse' knowing that in all probability they'd be dead themselves before long. Within a few weeks 80 per cent had been killed*

on Deborah Kerr. *Blimp* covers a stretch of time, but it is made by men whose own lives had taught them about collaboration. As Powell put it, he had a French cameraman, a German designer, a Hungarian writer, an Austrian actor, and a girl from Scotland. Plus his own cheek. This is one of the great war films, and as we know it was an irritant to a disapproving government.

#### UP IN THE AIR

One technology helped another. Just as the airplane's history was accelerated by the Great War so the movies fell upon the novelty of aerial warfare. Flying was the young excitement of the war. In the summer of 1914, France had maybe 400 aircraft. By November 1918 it had manufactured more than 60,000, many of which had crumpled and burned like matchboxes. Wounded in the cavalry, Jean Renoir had darted aside and joined a flying squadron: "The leader of our squadron was like a child lost in the wilderness. He invented missions which had not been ordered, and these attempts to escape from the boredom of our hutments, with their view of interminable fields of potatoes, did not always turn out happily... We set off to hunt Germans as light-heartedly as if we had been hunting rabbits..."

He was not alone among filmmakers. William Wellman served in the Lafayette Escadrille. Merian Cooper flew bombers. Howard Hawks, he said himself, was only just a little too late to be in France with the air show – his brother Kenneth was killed in a flying accident off Santa Monica in 1930 while shooting a war-in-the-air movie, *Such Men Are Dangerous* (1930). Wellman would direct *Wings* (1927), the first Oscar winner as best picture (shared with *Sunrise*). The poet of flying, Howard Hughes, would make *Hell's Angels* (1930). Hawks did *The Dawn Patrol* (1930). Cooper helped hurl aircraft at King Kong. A man in a cockpit was a medium close-up, glorifying courage and skill, and making the dog-fight a set piece of combat. Fly-boys (all the way to 1983's *The Right Stuff*) would be glamorous, saluting across the air to a comrade or the Red Baron. A knight's code prevailed. On the ground they often fought over the same girl. In reality, their chances were worse than those of men in the trenches. The planes were often held together by spit and glue.

But pilots were universal heroes. Charles Lindbergh and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry were too young to fly in



BETHEA ARCHIVE (3)





the war, but nothing stimulated that romance more than a near-miss. Don't forget that André Jurieu in *La Règle du jeu* is an impetuous transatlantic flier. The facts are unclear but William Faulkner said he had served with the British Royal Flying Corps in 1918, and in his 1935 novel *Pylon* he had a character, Roger Schumann, who had been a wartime ace – that's Robert Stack in the movie *The Tarnished Angels* (1957).

Those fly-boys came home with a readymade legend. In *The Lost Squadron* (a 1932 Selznick picture at RKO directed by George Archainbaud), Richard Dix, Joel McCrea and Robert Armstrong are wartime pilots who drift into flying work on pictures. They meet an autocratic German director (a pilot himself) prepared to sacrifice fliers for a great sequence – his name is von Furst and he is played by Erich von Stroheim, who understood the new place for pretending. Austrian and Jewish, Stroheim had come to America, picked up a 'von' and a monocle and started advising Great War movies on Prussian uniforms and arrogance. He never flew; he never fought. But in so many films he was the classic Hun. For Renoir, in *La Grande Illusion* he was von Rauffenstein, a pilot once but invalidated out with a broken neck.

That genre lasted. *The Great Waldo Pepper* (1975) was a labour of love for George Roy Hill, who had been a pilot in the Pacific and then in Korea. It has Robert Redford and Bo Svenson on the air-show circuit of the 1920s. They end up in Hollywood flying for movies with the German Ernst Kessler (Bo Brundin), who is based on Ernst Udet, a wartime ace who worked with Leni Riefenstahl, helped establish the *Luftwaffe* and then killed himself in 1941 because he was fed up with that other flier, Hermann Göring, who won medals in the war and ended up with 22 'hits'. Göring was more than his own hero in those days. He was living fiction, the head of a squadron that crashed their planes in 1918 rather than hand them over to the Allies.

Even Renoir enjoyed such stories. When he was shooting *Toni* (1935) in the south of France, its realism was interfered with by nearby aircraft. A pal from the war, Major Pinsard grounded his training flights for Renoir to have quiet. Then over dinner he told Renoir that on




seven occasions he had been shot down by Germans and all seven times he escaped! Renoir didn't have to believe all this, but it was the germ of *La Grande Illusion*, a famous anti-war film prompted by the stuff of adventure.

### IGNORANCE AND RACISM

Have we ever had films that get at the politics of war? I thought of *Gallipoli* (1981), a film about careless hopes and the humiliation of battle, and recalled the legend that it 'explained' an embittered Anzac reaction to the mother country. But whereas more than 11,000 Anzacs died in the battle, 34,000 from Great Britain were lost, and 56,000 from the Ottoman Empire. Did you realise that the Turks had won the battle, or that their forces had been led by Mustafa Kemal, who soon became leader of a new Turkish state? Moreover, in a recent book of interviews, Peter Weir says that in the aftermath of the Gallipoli campaign Australia held a referendum on whether it should apply conscription during the war. The country's leaders were startled by the 'No' response. So they took the referendum again! And still it was 'No'. If only the democratic politics of Great Britain had been flexible enough for such a vote.

But I am of a generation raised to fill in this equation: "Turkey = José Ferrer in *Lawrence of Arabia*" (the Puerto Ricans are everywhere). I think that is still regarded as a great British film, resonating with sumptuous 70mm photography, flamboyant casting, stirring battle scenes – "Aqaba!" – and that imperial music. But isn't it 1962's swashbuckling ignorance and blithe racism that could trample the map and the fate of the Middle East? (Whose Middle, whose East?) If it's a terrific film, how is it also a travesty? Could Arabia and its interests really be trusted to Anthony Quinn and Alec Guinness?

So many films have been omitted here, from Chaplin's *Shoulder Arms* (1918) and Pabst's *Westfront 1918* (1930) to Raymond Bernard's *Wooden Crosses* (1931), Francesco Rosi's *Many Wars Ago* (1970) and Boris Barnet's *Outskirts* (1933). Some of the best films about the war have the least combat, but is that a way of wondering if that dynamic does not overwhelm anti-war instincts and head towards the body count of videogames? 

**CROSSES TO BEAR**  
(Clockwise from bottom left)  
Abel Gance's *J'accuse* (1918),  
Powell and Pressburger's  
*The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) and Peter  
Weir's *Gallipoli* (1981)





IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM (C)

✚ If you want a shaming Great War film, it is *Sergeant York* (1940), made to encourage Americans to get into World War II, with a real hero, Alvin York, presented as Gary Cooper. It is Hawks's grimmest hour (and his greatest hit), in which York becomes a slapstick sharpshooter, the Tennessee pacifist as battlefield wizard. Somehow that film has to sit beside the stricken gaze of Richard Barthelmess, who recognises the nightmare of command in Hawks's *The Dawn Patrol* (1930), who served again as a pilot who may have lost his nerve in *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939), and who is essential as the soldier who has come home a morphine addict in Wellman's *Heroes for Sale* (1933). Barthelmess stopped making movies in 1942 and enlisted in the Naval Reserve. He is the one lead actor in American films who suggests that war destroys survivors and finds terror as a natural state. We still have no fair film about fear, but old soldiers avoided brave officers.

There's not much more to be done than admit that the movies – in so many ways an invention from the era of the war – made a hash of telling its story. This may sound like an odd thing to say in a movie magazine. Wouldn't it be pretty to think the movies had done justice to the war? But if you take that Hemingway phrase about courage being "grace under pressure" and apply it to the man himself and his novel from the Italian front, *A Farewell to Arms*, the results are depleting. Hemingway loathed the tasteful sweetness of the Frank Borzage version, with Gary Cooper and Helen Hayes. The Selznick production, with Rock Hudson and Jennifer Jones, is ponderous. John Huston walked away from directing it in dismay. There was a TV miniseries in 1966, with Vanessa Redgrave and George Hamilton (directed by Rex Tucker), a casting coup that no one seems to remember. Time and again, the movies have thought that novel must be a love story, so they have elected to abandon the prose style: "Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees. The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year and we saw the troops marching along the road and the dust rising and leaves, stirred by the breeze, falling and the soldiers marching and afterwards the road bare and white except for the leaves."

That's from the first paragraph of the novel, and it's

beyond any film ever attempted. But Hemingway managed to convert the experience of war into a private dream of courage and his persuading himself that he had relieved Paris in 1944. But grace under pressure is just one of the lies the movies assist and which can make the war movie one of the most sheltered and adolescent of genres. This is what Hawks's Alvin York aspires to, but it comes close to fascist aplomb.

In writing this piece, I found imprints of the war in other arts that were so much more piercing. In 1918, John Singer Sargent, the society portraitist, whose paintings are often employed on the covers of Henry James novels, was commissioned to go to the front to make a picture. In August, he did drawings at a casualty station near Arras for a painting called *Gassed*. Many of Sargent's pictures had been as tall and upright as his subjects. For *Gassed*, the world changed shape: it is a CinemaScope picture, 7.5 feet by 20 feet, in which a ragged line of soldiers, wounded and blinded by mustard gas, are helped along a duckboard. On either side, their route is hedged by piles of bodies. It is not an artful picture: it seems to know that lustre would be tasteless. But it is a breathtaking frieze. Do any movies of the Great War match its stillness?

You can treat World War I as a historical event, book-ended by Sarajevo and the Armistice. You can say it was the first of two wars, or see it as the start of a world at war that has not ended, and cannot. So the smaller wars go on and on, and they are bad enough. But more significant is the larger state of war and its readiness that has obtained ever since and which regards schemes of humanism and progress as mocking rhetoric. We are mobilised and we have been for 100 years just as we are accustomed now to the regularity of senseless destruction. The train timetables may be samplers of the past but we have weapon systems that are computer-ready for automatic firing – and sometimes we realise we have forgotten their password. Ⓢ

**i** *A Farewell to Arms* (1932) and *Paths of Glory* (1957) will be re-released at the BFI Southbank, London, and selected UK cinemas nationwide in May. The first in a three-part season of films at the BFI Southbank, 'World War I: The War that Changed Everything', will focus on cinema about the old order and the events leading up to the conflict. The second and third parts will follow in 2016 and 2018

*Grace under pressure is just one of the lies the movies assist and which can make the war movie one of the most sheltered and adolescent of genres*

#### BLIND FEAR

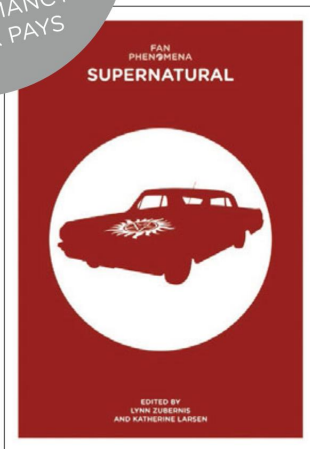
The society portraitist John Singer Sargent was commissioned to travel to the front in 1918, and his 20-foot canvas *Gassed* (above), painted at a casualty station near Arras, captures the horror of World War I with eerie stillness



# FAN PHENOMENA

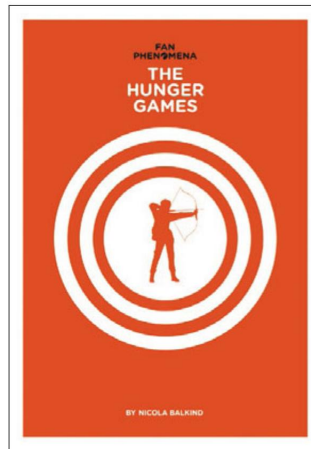
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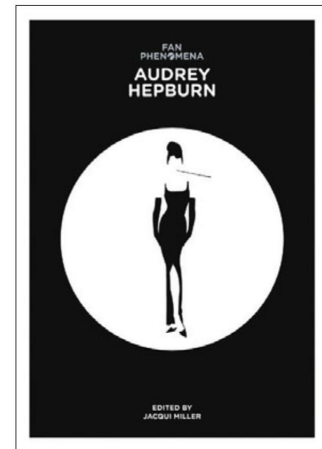
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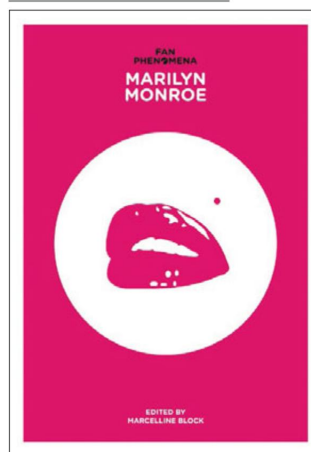
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# TROUBLE EVERY DAY

*Amat Escalante's unflinchingly brutal drama 'Heli' reflects the director's desire to bear witness to the reality of the violence of Mexico's drug wars. But amid the depiction of everyday horrors and casual torture, a deeper note of humanity and hope emerges from the gloom*

By Jonathan Romney

It sometimes happens that a film contains a single image so striking or disturbing that it can eclipse everything else around it – even make it hard to see the film as anything but a repository for that image. This is the danger courted by *Heli*, the third feature by Mexican filmmaker Amat Escalante, which earned him the Best Director prize in Cannes last year. It begins troublingly enough, with a man being hanged by a drug gang, but later contains a scene in which a man's genitals are doused with paraffin and then set on fire, as the man writhes, hands bound to a hook in the ceiling. It's an intensely distressing image, and in discussions of *Heli* in Cannes last year, where it premiered in Competition, this image tended to obscure the rest of the film. That's often the way: after all, how much do you remember of *Titus Andronicus* other than the mutilations and the eating of cannibalistic pies?

That scene in *Heli* added to the perception of Escalante as a director out to shock above all – especially after his previous film *Los bastardos* (2008). There, Escalante faced us with a shooting not only extremely violent but also abrupt enough to make you jump out of your seat – then left you, with a fixed extended shot, to contemplate a woman's headless body and a blood-spattered wall resembling an action painting. Such knowing moments of violence have understandably repelled some critics. Reviewing *Heli* in Cannes last year, *Variety*'s Scott Foundas called the film “nihilistic” and “accomplished but singularly unpleasant” and saw it as plunging its audience into “Mexico's vicious cycle of drug-fuelled violence, with no end – or much of a discernible point – in sight”.

In Cannes, I certainly had misgivings about *Heli*'s depiction of violence – partly because it seemed counterproductive. The height of its graphic horror comes in a sequence in which two young men have been captured by a *narco* gang and taken to a house to be tortured for their part in the disappearance of a package of drugs. The scene is shocking not least because the house is occupied by several children and adolescents who are encouraged to watch the torture and even participate: one boy tentatively has a go at beating a victim with a hefty bat. It's shocking also because of the scene's detachment, and the depiction of the children's detachment: they are as interested in the videogame they have on the go as they are in the violence. Although this shock juxtaposition of extremity and casual indifference is hardly new (see Michael Haneke's *Funny Games*, as well as Thomas Clay's *The Great Ecstasy of Robert Carmichael*), the scene is disturbing in the way it integrates violence into the mundanity of everyday life: an older woman looks in cautiously but wearily from the next room, as if this is just another rou-

tine example of the mischief her boys get up to.

The scene arises partly out of a documentary impulse, says Escalante, who had intended to be a documentarist before turning to fiction. “I wasn't trying to give the impression of an everyday situation. What I wanted to show was who was doing these things – and to do that I showed that there's an older woman, and the older brothers and the cousins, and that's the certified truth. You can look anywhere – they've found 11-, 12-, 13-year-old children who have been paid to torture and murder people.” So there's already plenty here that is disturbing without the ordeal by fire, which is depicted in a cleanly framed head-on wide shot (Escalante's directorial signature is one of extreme control, clarity and often telegraphic economy). We see the victim ablaze, thrashing in agony – quite briefly, and possibly, in the film's release version, for not quite as long as in the Cannes cut. It's hard to tell from memory; the running time is listed by the BBFC, which has passed *Heli* uncut, as a few seconds under 105 minutes, which was the Cannes length, but when I interviewed Escalante at the time he told me he was considering reducing the shot. But apart from the image's extremity, there's the problem of what we think as we watch it. We may initially be taken aback by the horror of the spectacle, but then we catch ourselves asking how it was done, and whether Escalante used digitals (he did). The power of such scenes becomes almost a matter of timing – of judging how long a shot can be extended so that it has its full effect between the moment of pained revulsion and/or empathy and the moment at which we question it as illusion, as a merely technical phenomenon.

“I might do some adjustments,” Escalante told me last May. “That shot was already much longer and I cut a lot of it out, because there was a point where, even if it looked perfectly real, it was a problem. When we submitted to Cannes, that scene wasn't finished – you just saw a guy moving around. Maybe that helped – they didn't have to ask us, ‘Did you really burn that guy?’ I understand what you mean – it's distracting because it's such an effect.”

For Escalante, there is an ethical imperative in the realism of such scenes – in the case of *Heli*, he wants to make his characters' sufferings palpably real, and to make audiences aware of the reality of the violence in Mexico's drug wars (which, according to some statistics, resulted in as many as 125,000 deaths during President Calderón's administration between 2006 and 2012). “Cinema is to see things, you know? So I want to show these things in the first place. It's about showing them in a way that the audience feels a small taste of something that's closer to what it feels like to have suffered those

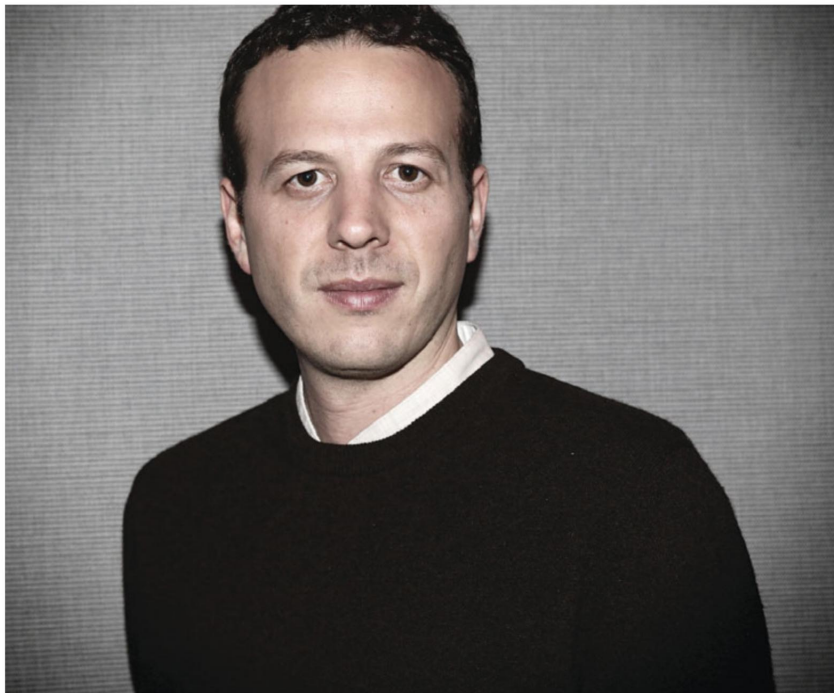


**HANGING ON**  
When *Heli*, who lives in Guanajuato, Mexico, with his wife Sabrina (bottom right), finds and disposes of a package of drugs, it prompts a murderous police raid on his home (right) and leads to him being tortured by a vicious drug gang (above)









🔴 things. One thing is the idea of those things, when you read it in a newspaper – it's different if you see it and are confronted by it, and you almost feel it viscerally." Some commentators in Mexico have not thanked Escalante for highlighting such themes: one writer, he tells me, said that *Heli* would affect Mexico's reputation adversely in the same way that *Midnight Express* (1978) affected Turkey's, and that Escalante deserved to be jailed for defaming his country.

But *Heli* isn't just a film about violence – nor just about the drug wars. Seeing the film again, I'm surprised to realise just how much happens after the torture scene – the hero returns home and begins a slow uphill struggle to regain some sort of normality. For, like Escalante's previous work, *Heli* is fundamentally a film about home, and the fragility of the security it provides. Heli Silva (Armando Espitia) is a young man living, like Escalante, in Guanajuato, north-west of Mexico City. A worker in a car plant, he lives with his wife Sabrina (Linda González) and their baby, his father and his 12-year-old sister Estela (Andrea Vergara). She's in love with 17-year-old Beto (Juan Eduardo Palacios), an army cadet who's constantly pressurising her to sleep with him: the scenes between the two, with his hand on her thigh, may be especially alarming in the current climate of sensitivity about the sexualisation of children, but again, says Escalante, he intended to reflect a reality: "Part of the inspiration of the film comes from the things I see in Mexico – very young girls having babies and starting life, basically having no childhood. The baby in the film was six months old – we had the mother there on set, and she was 14. That's not a freak situation in the city where I live."

A government PR exercise in Heli's vicinity involves the burning of a mountain of marijuana and cocaine – an exercise designed, announces the official in charge, to restore public confidence in government institutions. But a significant stash of drugs has been secretly stored nearby: Beto steals a packet and hides it in the water tank of Estela's home. Finding it, Heli decides to make the drugs

*Part of the inspiration comes from the things I see in Mexico – very young girls having babies and basically having no childhood. That's not a freak situation in the city where I live*

disappear and flings them into a hole in the ground. Calamity descends with the abruptness that seems to be an Escalante trademark. Heli's father is sitting quietly at home when there's a hammering at the door, and police burst in and shoot him dead. Heli, Beto and Estela are all seized – with Estela's puppy summarily having its neck snapped – and are taken off to meet different fates.

Whether their captors are police in league with the drug gangs, rogue police abusing their power, or gang members in disguise is never clear, and doesn't really matter. Just as in Gerardo Naranjo's recent *Miss Bala* (2011) – which more flamboyantly used action-thriller language to depict the complexity of Mexican drug-related violence – it's hard to know who's in league with whom. We only sense that ordinary people like Heli's family are defenceless before those who carry arms, whether they are on the side of authority or of crime, or occupying a dark area of collusion between the two.

In *Heli*, the home seems to offer refuge from the violence of the outside world, but it's slender protection. This was also the case in *Los bastardos*, a 'home invasion' drama in which we ostensibly identify with the outsiders, two Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles. We see them look for work as labourers, find an employer who tries to renege on his promises, then face abuse from young white Americans in a park. They then break in to the house of a middle-aged American woman and hold her at gunpoint. The Mexicans are the invading menace, but they have had our sympathy from the start, and so we're invited to see the situation's horrific outcome as directly related to the way Latino immigrants are treated in the US. But when the violence explodes across the screen, the drama's moral and social components are eclipsed, as we are shocked into a sort of catatonic inertia by the extremity of the situation. It's as if, by letting off this explosive charge, Escalante leaves our ears ringing, deafening us to the more complex resonances of his story.

Escalante's debut, *Sangre* (2005), was also about home and family – the title, meaning 'blood', less to do with violence than with the theme of consanguinity. It's about a mild, seemingly clueless middle-aged man (Cirilo Recio Dávila) who works at a meaningless job, counting people as they enter and leave a government office. He has an adult daughter with drug problems who wants to live with him, but his wife won't hear of it and keeps Diego in thrall with her somewhat mechanical demands for, and offers of, sex (this is certainly Escalante's film that is most open to charges of misogyny). When his daughter dies, Diego dumps her body in a bin, then tracks the corpse to a tip on the outskirts of the city. It's there, wandering further afield, that while crossing a stream, Diego mysteriously appears to walk on water, as if elevated to some sort of messianic status – a suggestion derisively defused a moment later with a bathetic pratfall.

I remember being struck, and puzzled, by *Sangre* in Cannes in 2005, and also finding it hard to take the film entirely on its own terms. It premiered there in the same year as Carlos Reygadas's *Battle in Heaven*, on which Escalante had been assistant director (Reygadas's company Mantarraya has produced all Escalante's features). However consciously one tried to avoid this, it was hard not to read *Sangre* as somehow a pendant to *Battle in Heaven*, which similarly set its harsh city-based realism against an implied edge of metaphysical





strangeness. Both featured non-professional actors required to appear in physically revealing or sexually explicit scenes; the protagonists of both were abject or foolish, played by non-professionals who looked gauche and a little lost on screen, laying the films open to suspicions of contempt or mockery towards their characters, or even their players. In retrospect, Escalante concedes that he may have given the wrong signals by casting the cross-eyed, balding Dávila in *Sangre*: “He was my next-door neighbour. I found him really interesting and magnetic – he was very funny, very awkward, very intelligent and sensitive, and those things made me want to film him the way he is, without acting. That somehow came across as if I was taking advantage or making fun of him, and maybe that was a miscalculation on my part.”

In *Heli*, however, Escalante is more clearly compassionate towards his characters – as usual, played by non-professionals. Even the misguided, over-insistent Beto is depicted as suffering from the ordinary folly of male adolescence, while Heli – played with sympathetic, taciturn intensity by Espitia – is above all a young working man with a strong sense of responsibility towards his family. He represents ordinary heroism and the tenacity of the oppressed, in one scene facing down

an armed car that threateningly drives up to his door.

One of their captors tells Heli and Beto, “Now you’ll get to know God in the land of the damned.” On a first viewing, in which the violence stamps itself on your consciousness, *Heli* seems to depict contemporary Mexico as the land of the damned – and if the film were just doing that, then perhaps it would be easy to agree with *Variety* that there’s no “discernible point” to the exercise. But when you refocus on the film’s final third, in which Heli and his family struggle determinedly back to a possible future, you begin to see the film’s real design, and its humanity. *Heli* ends on a note of hope, if not of complete resolution – on an image of the family home bringing solace and calm, though hardly offering a stable bulwark against the outside world. The final shot shows sunlight streaming through curtains, suggesting a space that’s at once calming and yet dangerously porous and fragile. It leaves you with at least some confidence for the family’s future – and if you had your doubts about *Sangre* and *Los bastardos*, the unsettling but very controlled *Heli* makes Escalante’s future as a director look much more intriguing than you may previously have thought. **S**

**i** *Heli* is released in UK cinemas on 23 May and is reviewed on page 75

**A PLACE TO CALL HOME**  
The importance of home is a key theme of *Heli* (pictured above with Juan Eduardo Palacios's Beto and Andrea Vergara's Estela), something director Amat Escalante (above left) explored in his two previous films, *Los bastardos* (below left) and *Sangre* (below right)





# DARIO ARGENTO

Beginning his directorial career with a trio of stylised murder mysteries that led him to be dubbed the 'Italian Hitchcock', Argento graduated in the mid-70s to full-blown horror, proving a lasting influence on younger filmmakers. Here, he recalls his youthful success as a film critic, his early collaboration with Bertolucci and Leone, his debt to Antonioni and Lang, and his ongoing desire to experiment with form. **Interview by Pasquale Iannone**

Andrew Dominik's recent George V. Higgins adaptation, *Killing Them Softly* (2012), includes a scene of balletic violence in which a character is shot in his car while stopped at traffic lights on a rain-swept night. Using Ketty Lester's lilting 1962 version of 'Love Letters', Dominik films in ultra-slow motion – so slow in fact, that we see discharged bullet cases hitting raindrops in mid-air. For most, the first filmmaker who jumps to mind when it comes to aestheticised, slow-mo violence is Sam Peckinpah, but Dominik seems to have drawn his inspiration from another virtuoso of the operatically choreographed death scene. In Dario Argento's third feature, *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* (1971), a character gets a similar comeuppance in a hail of shattered windscreen glass, all set to a hauntingly beautiful cue by Ennio Morricone.

Dominik is by no means the only modern filmmaker to have been inspired by Argento, a towering figure in international horror cinema and master of the filmic *giallo*, a genre of stylish, graphic murder mysteries whose name – literally 'yellow' – originated with the coloured book jackets given to a popular Italian series of pulp thrillers. Recent titles such as Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan*, Peter Strickland's *Berberian Sound Studio*, Nicolas Winding Refn's *Only God Forgives* and Hélène Cattet and Bruno Forzani's two films *Amer* and *The Strange Colour of Your Body's Tears* have Argento's black leather gloves all over them. Last year, Cattet and Forzani even made an affectionate TV video essay tribute to Argento.

Although he was certainly not the first filmmaker to have made *gialli*, Argento was instrumental in bringing the form to international prominence with his 'Animal' trilogy – *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (1970), *The Cat o'Nine Tails* (1971) and *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* – a trio of lurid, feverishly stylised murder mysteries that spawned scores of imitations.

By the mid-1970s, critics were rushing to proclaim him the 'Italian Hitchcock'. For his part, Argento has never hidden the influence

of the Master of Suspense; he even made a TV movie called *Do You Like Hitchcock?* in 2005. From the mid-70s, Argento moved from *gialli* to full-blown horror in mature masterpieces such as *Suspiria* (1977), *Inferno* (1980), *Tenebrae* (1982) and *Phenomena* (1984), setting aside narrative logic to terrify audiences with their baroque *mise-en-scène* and brilliantly executed set pieces.

Argento's recent output has divided critics, but, at 73, he continues to push boundaries and is alive to new developments, working with younger generations of filmmaking talent. In 2004, he called upon celebrated DP Benoît Debie – who shot Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible* and *Enter the Void*, and Harmony Korine's *Spring Breakers* – to provide the Dogme-inspired visuals of *The Card Player* (2004) while his most recent feature *Dracula 3D* (2012) sees him experimenting for the first time with 3D.

## ON DARIO ARGENTO

**'It's very rare that a director gives you complete freedom. Of the hundreds of scores I've written, there are only ten or so where I've been encouraged by the director to really experiment. Good examples are the first scores I did for Elio Petri [*A Quiet Place in the Country*, *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion*] and Dario Argento [*The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, *The Cat o'Nine Tails*, *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*].' Composer Ennio Morricone**

**'It's rock 'n' roll, isn't it? I didn't even see it as cinema, it's just this psychedelic, rock 'n' roll experience. It's just so bombastic and the Goblin score has a lot to do with it. It's as if Peter Greenaway had made a rock opera.'** Director Peter Strickland on 'Suspiria'

**Pasquale Iannone: Your father was a film producer, your grandfather was a distributor and your mother was a famous photographer. Was there a lot of talk about cinema when you were growing up?**

**Dario Argento:** My father [Salvatore] had this habit of coming home, shaking his head and declaring that Italian cinema was dead, but of course we all know that those years were some of the most successful in Italian film history.

**PI: I'm interested to know a bit about your life as a young film critic during the so-called golden years of Italian cinema.**

**DA:** I never studied film at university; most of what I knew about cinema came from personal study. I started writing about film while still at school. I did a few pieces for a variety of local magazines and these got me noticed by the famous newspaper *Paese Sera*. I was only 17, but within a couple of years I became lead critic. Apart from the fact that I was much younger, I felt different to other Italian film critics of the time. I wrote about different kinds of films and I think that's why *Paese Sera* hired me.

**PI: Do you remember any of those articles in particular?**

**DA:** I remember doing an interview with Fritz Lang. He'd always been a big hero of mine and when I met him in Rome, I found him to be completely charming. He passed away in 1976 and I cast one of his favourite leading ladies, Joan Bennett, as Madame Blanc in *Suspiria*, partly in homage to him. I remember asking her what Lang was really like to work with. "Ferocious," she said. "He could be really wicked." "Really? He couldn't have been nicer when I interviewed him," I said. "You should have seen him on a film set!" she said.

**PI: In the later 1960s, you started writing screenplays, culminating in a famous collaboration with Bernardo Bertolucci on Sergio Leone's *Once upon a Time in the West* [1968]. Do you remember your first screenplay?**

**DA:** My first attempt was a western written with a friend of mine, but it never got made.









Then I wrote another – a modern version of *Macbeth* – but that one fell through as well. Sergio was the first person to really believe in my ability and he had the idea of pairing me with Bertolucci. Bernardo and I were around the same age but he had already directed a couple of films. Sergio was world-famous after the *Dollars* trilogy and could have had his pick of screenwriters but he chose us, two relative novices. One of the reasons I think Sergio hired us was that he wanted *Once upon a Time in the West* to have a different feel from his earlier westerns. Above all, he wanted a female protagonist at the centre.

**PI: Leone also placed less importance on dialogue.**

**DA:** Absolutely. When he was sent a script, he would quickly flick through it and if he saw large chunks of dialogue, he would discard it straight away. He said that cinema was about images and sounds, not dialogue. Hollywood films never kept their mouths shut, he said. But I also think it's something that Americans have in everyday life, this sense of *horror vacui* – a fear of silences. They always have to talk and talk for fear of appearing rude.

**PI: They're very different directors, but in his use of silences, Leone was similar to Michelangelo Antonioni.**

**DA:** Antonioni was another of my major influences. I remember reading an interview with Jack Nicholson where he talked about filming a scene in *The Passenger* [1974] that takes place in a church. "Do you want me to do anything in the church?" Nicholson asked. "No," said Antonioni. "Just walk around." The actor took a while to understand that Antonioni wanted to emphasise the sense of mystery, of ambiguity.

**PI: Leone would also allow Morricone's music to drive certain scenes.**

**DA:** He'd foreground sounds too – the wind, the birds.

**PI: There's the famous opening scene from *Once upon a Time in the West* with its squeaking and creaking, the fly on Jack Elam's stubble, the splashes of water on Woody Strode's hat.**

**DA:** Yes, that was all in our original screenplay.

**PI: In 1970, you made your feature debut with *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*.**

**After writing the screenplay you approached a variety of producers, but they all wanted to change it in some way.**

**DA:** More than change it, they wanted to hand the project over to a more established, experienced director. Most of the producers seemed to like the story but they didn't want me to direct. I really felt that the film would take the *giallo* in new directions and was adamant that I should make it myself. I asked my father if we could do the film together, him producing and me directing. "Are you sure?" he said. "Do you think you're ready?" It was a big leap, but I was confident that I could make a good job of it. In fact, looking back, I made *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* instinctively, spontaneously, without labouring too much over details. When it came out, it ended up being a huge success, even in the US.

**PI: You shot the film in Rome, your hometown, and since then, you've returned regularly. Critics often refer to Fellini's Rome or Pasolini's Rome but what about Argento's?**



*The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (1970)

**DA:** I've used the city in many different ways. In *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, I emphasised Rome's half-modern, half-ancient aspect. In *Tenebrae*, the cityscape became more abstract, like passages in Antonioni's *L'ecclisse* [1962]. More recently, I was drawn to the outskirts of Rome for *The Card Player*, and in *The Third Mother* [2007], the story dictated that I shot in and around the historical centre, looking at Rome almost from a tourist's perspective. More generally, my sense of urban space has been strongly influenced by the paintings of Giorgio de Chirico.

**PI: After the success of the 'Animal' trilogy, you changed register with *The Five Days of Milan* [1973], a 19th-century historical satire starring Italian singer-songwriter Adriano Celentano.**

**DA:** Hardly anyone went to see it. For many it was a huge surprise and disappointment that I had not continued with the *giallo* and turned instead to period drama. It's always been an important film for me though, perhaps my most political. I wanted to draw links with events leading up to the Risorgimento and the socio-political situation of the time; we were

*On 'Suspiria' and 'Inferno' I was inspired by the Technicolor films of the 30s and 40s – like 'Black Narcissus' and 'The Red Shoes'*



Hard rain: *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* (1971), part of Argento's 'Animal' trilogy, spawned a host of imitators



*The Cat o'Nine Tails* (1971)

living through the *anni di piombo* [Years of Lead] with terrorism, bombings, social unrest.

**PI: The serial-killer *giallo* *Deep Red* [1975] is undoubtedly a key film in your career.**

**DA:** I had been thinking of the film for a while and wrote the screenplay in just two weeks while staying in a secluded house in the country. A bit like my first film, the script took shape instinctively. I would look down at my typewriter and whole scenes seemed to form by themselves. It was the quickest piece I've ever written. The only thing was that after spending the whole day writing about that world and those situations, I started to feel more than a little uneasy staying there at night. More often than not, as soon as the sun went down, I would quickly make my way back to the city.

**PI: After trying unsuccessfully to get *Deep Purple* to record the score for *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*, *Deep Red* marked your first collaboration with Italian prog-rockers Goblin.**

**DA:** I originally approached Pink Floyd to score *Deep Red*. I even came to London to meet them, but they couldn't commit to the project. So I thought, why not try and find an up-and-coming Italian band? My relationship with Goblin ended up being similar to the kind I had with Sergio Leone. [Frontman Claudio] Simonetti and the rest of the group were very young, in their early twenties. They would observe the day's shooting and then they would come back to my house and





**Inferno (1980)**

let me listen to some of their ideas for music. I was very particular about the kind of sound I wanted and I guided them throughout the whole process.

**PI:** That bass-driven jazz-funk continues to inspire musicians to this day – there's the Milan-based group Calibro 35, for instance.

**DA:** Yes, Goblin are still touring and are hugely popular. The *Deep Red* soundtrack includes some of their best work.

**PI:** With *Suspiria* and *Inferno*, the first two films in the 'Three Mothers' trilogy, we enter into the world of horror, of nightmares. Stylistically, what strikes me most about these two films is their expressionist use of colour – *Inferno* especially.

**DA:** I was inspired by the early Technicolor films of the 30s and 40s. Those burning, vivid colours: the interiors of John Ford's *Drums Along the Mohawk* [1939], for instance, or Powell and Pressburger's *Black Narcissus* [1947] and *The Red Shoes* [1948]. I saw *Suspiria* and *Inferno* as dreamlike, adult fairytales so I felt they should be saturated in colour. Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* [1937] was another key point of reference.

**PI:** Towards the end of the 1970s, you started collaborating with George A. Romero. You worked together on *Dawn of the Dead* [1978] and more than a decade later you made *Two Evil Eyes* [1990], a film inspired by your shared passion for Edgar Allan Poe.

**DA:** George and I met through a mutual friend in New York and we struck up a friendship immediately. I suggested we make a film together, which I would partly finance, and this became *Dawn of the Dead*. George actually came to Rome to write the film. *Two Evil Eyes* was intended as a portmanteau film and was to have had four episodes, each an adaptation of a Poe story: one by me, one by Romero, one by John Carpenter and another by Stephen King. Before long, Carpenter and King both dropped out. Stephen was battling addiction at the time and his wife felt it best they move out to New England so he could get away from it all. John had to pull out when he was given financing for a major feature and so it was just myself and George left. He and I rethought the whole project and decided to take on two of the lengthier Poe stories. George adapted 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar' and I took on 'The Black Cat'. We shot both episodes in George's hometown of Pittsburgh.

**PI:** You have also worked in television, from the 1973 Italian series *Door into Darkness* to 2005's *Masters of Horror*. How would you say the relationship between cinema and TV has changed over the years?



**Tenebrae (1982)**

**DA:** TV has definitely become more filmic. Writers and directors are given a lot more freedom. For instance, when I went to the US to work on a couple of episodes of *Masters of Horror*, the producers said, "Listen Dario, you're free to do whatever story you want in whatever way you want." "Are you sure?" I said. "Because when you give me the green light, I'm really going to go all-out." "Don't worry," they said. "That's exactly what we want." So I ended up doing an episode in the first season called 'Jenifer' with Steve Weber and then one in the second series called 'Pelts' with Meat Loaf.

**PI:** Were the producers true to their word?

**DA:** For the most part. They cut an oral sex scene I filmed for 'Jenifer', but that wasn't too much of an issue – I knew it was going to be too explicit.

**PI:** Another recent TV project of yours was *Do You Like Hitchcock?*. Of course, from your very early days as a filmmaker, critics have called you the 'Italian Hitchcock'.

**DA:** That film was my homage to a great maestro, but it's more Hitchcockian in content than in style. There's lots of talk about Hitch because the protagonist Giulio [played by Elio Germano] is a scholar writing a dissertation on his films.

**PI:** Experimentation, both narrative and formal, has been a constant throughout your career.

In the past decade, you've made one film using minimal artificial light [*The Card Player*] and also your first film in 3D [*Dracula 3D*].



**Deep Red (1975)**

**DA:** Yes, for *The Card Player*, I was inspired by the Dogme filmmakers to use as little artificial light as possible.

**PI:** I suppose it was quite a departure – in lighting terms, it's the opposite of a film like *Suspiria*.

**DA:** That's exactly what I was after; it was an experiment I wanted to try. It was a really stimulating experience, much like shooting in 3D for the first time. When we started filming *Dracula*, I still remember sitting at the monitor and seeing the first scene we'd shot and being completely bowled over by this sense of immersion in a filmic world.

**PI:** In your 2012-13 TV series for Rai, *100 pallottole d'Argento* [100 Silver Bullets] in which you curated and presented a season of 100 of your favourite movies, you championed the work of directors such as Guillermo del Toro, Tomas Alfredson and Neil Marshall.

**DA:** I had to put together a season of my favourite films, a panorama of world cinema from the silent era to the present day, mostly horror or thriller titles. It was brave commissioning from Rai as many of the titles were very obscure. The first series got excellent ratings so I am looking forward to doing a second. It'll be another 100 titles but this time with a stronger focus on silent horror. **S**



A selection of Argento's films are available on DVD and Blu-ray from Arrow Films



**True colours:** Argento imagined *Suspiria* (1977) as a dreamlike, adult fairytale



EXHIBITION

## PROJECT THE LEGEND

An innovative exhibition at the Cinémathèque française, France's temple of cinephilia, pays tribute to its founding priest, Henri Langlois

**By Michael Temple**

The Cinémathèque française in Paris is currently celebrating the centenary of Henri Langlois (1914-77), one of its historic founders and certainly its best-known director, a role that he effectively held, under several titles, from 1936 to his death. A controversial and paradoxical figure, Langlois was often criticised for his poor technical administration of the Cinémathèque française during his lifetime and was briefly removed from his post in 1968, only to be spectacularly reinstated by the minister of culture, André Malraux, after protests and even violent demonstrations on the part of directors, actors and producers in France and across the international film community.

Idolised by successive generations of filmmakers and artists – most famously the French New Wave, whose film education was significantly acquired at the Cinémathèque française rather than at film school – Langlois enjoys in French film culture a mythical, almost mystical, status that is unimaginable in any other country. Put simply, his image is that of a visionary artist, remembered as a poet of film programming and as the conceptual architect of the Musée du Cinéma (first at the Avenue de Messine in 1948 and later at the Palais de Chaillot in 1972), as well as the curator of countless film exhibitions around the world.

Already the subject of several books, numerous articles and even a handful of films, Langlois is now being honoured by the Cinémathèque française in a threefold celebration: an 800-page anthology of his writing, much of it previously unpublished; a two-month film retrospective exploring his work as an archivist and programmer; and, most significantly, an ambitious multimedia exhibition entitled 'The Imaginary Museum of Henri Langlois'. Last month, before the exhibition opened, I was lucky enough to see the show in its final preparatory stages and to exclusively interview its curator, Dominique Païni, and his research assistant, Maroussia Dubreuil.

Païni was himself director of the Cinémathèque française between 1991 and 2000, and is well known for his subsequent curatorial work at the Pompidou Centre, where he staged exhibitions on Alfred Hitchcock in 2001 and Jean Cocteau in 2003, as well as making possible Jean-Luc Godard's *Voyage(s) en utopie* in 2006. He was also the conceptual designer of the Musée Lumière in Lyons, which opened in 2003, and more recently curated a Michelangelo Antonioni show in the Palazzo dei Diamanti in Ferrara, the prototype for a future Antonioni museum. As he took me around the exhibition at the Cinémathèque

française, and in our subsequent discussion, Païni set out in simple terms both his personal vision of Langlois and the curatorial decisions that informed his design of the 'Imaginary Museum'.

First, and fundamentally, Païni is happy to make it clear that this show will not please everyone, certainly not those expecting a balanced, objective or 'documentary' exhibition about Langlois's institutional career at the Cinémathèque française. As he says, to paraphrase John Ford, he would rather "project the legend", since there already exists an excellent historical account of the Cinémathèque française and Langlois's role within it, written by its current scientific director, Laurent Mannoni. Although one could theoretically imagine a curatorial 'adaptation' of Mannoni's *Histoire de la Cinémathèque française* (2006), Païni's focus is very much on the creative spirit of Langlois rather than the institution that he helped to bring into being. Nor would anyone who knows Païni's previous work think of commissioning him to

curate a documentary show, especially if they had seen his bold and imaginative 'Hitchcock and Art: Fatal Coincidences', which situated the director's film work in the intermedial context of late 19th- and early 20th-century visual culture, in particular relating cinema to what the French call '*les arts plastiques*', ie painting, drawing, photography, sculpture, installations and even architecture. The current Langlois show has been absolutely and unashamedly created in the same visual or 'plastic' spirit, in terms of its material content and conceptual design.

That spirit is perfectly palpable even from the show's opening spaces. The first piece we encounter as we enter the exhibition is

*Langlois enjoys an almost mystical status, unimaginable in any other country, as a poet of film programming*



**Live to dream:** the ambitious multimedia Langlois exhibition is curated in tune with his creative spirit

© COLLECTION LA CINÉMATHEQUE FRANÇAISE



one of many specially commissioned works: Henri Foucault's *Donne-moi tes yeux* (2014), a composition entirely made up from real or imaginary film titles (*Give Me Your Eyes* is a Sacha Guitry film from 1943), as they appear in 'freeze frames' captured on miniature screens. There follows a series of portraits-cum-homages inspired by Pierre Alechinsky's beautiful 1957 piece *Pour saluer Henri Langlois* ('Saluting Henri Langlois'). These are mostly by contemporary artists who have integrated the film-reel into their creations either as material – Rosa Barba's *Cut Here* (*Coupez ici*, 2012) – or as motif, as in Jean-Jacques Lebel's *Henri Langlois's Bathtub* (*La Baignoire d'Henri Langlois*, 2013). Next, an extract from Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1998) devoted to Langlois leads us to an installation recreating a small screening room, furnished with about 30 red seats, whose imaginary spectators are watching a series of carefully composed triple-screen projections. These film extracts exhibited in parallel are a direct homage to Langlois's art of composing film programmes into suggestive combinations of works and revealing juxtapositions of images, a practice often referred to as 'programming as montage'.

The third space of the exhibition is the closest Paini gets to the standard documentary function of telling a story and providing informational context about his subject. This takes the form of a serpentine scroll of facts, names, places, dates, titles and events, which is literally wrapped around the red screening room, as if the latter were the secret heart of Langlois's public and professional life. "Once I've done room three, I'm free," Paini told me with a broad grin. Free, that is, to pursue three further key aspects of Langlois's universe, in addition to the art of programming and the daily survival of a Cinémathèque – which rooms two and three have elegantly and 'plastically' materialised for the visitor.

Thus in room four Paini freely explores Langlois's deep love and intimate knowledge of the great visual artists of his time. Matisse, Chagall, Calder, Duchamp, Miró, Magritte, Picabia, Villeglé and others all appear in this section, either because Paini wants to draw attention to parallels between their work and Langlois's artistic vision or because Langlois actually made or planned to make films about the artists in question, or used examples of their work in the many exhibitions he curated during his career. For example, special attention is devoted to Gino Severini, whose *La Danse du pan-pan au 'Monico'* (*The Pan-Pan Dance at the 'Monico'*, 1909-1911) Langlois had displayed in the entrance to his Etienne-Jules Marey exhibition of 1962, and to Fernand Léger, whose *Ballet mécanique* (1924) remained an absolute reference point for Langlois in terms of the possible 'plastic' conversation between cinema and the visual arts.

This kind of intermedial exchange leads straight into the fifth and largest space, in which Paini traces Langlois's faithful and at times directly material support of experimental filmmakers from the 1920s to the 1970s, from Abel Gance's *La Roue* (1923) and René Clair's *Entr'acte* (1924) to Philippe Garrel and Jonas Mekas via Kenneth Anger, Pierre Clémenti, Andy Warhol and others. Again, the moving image is



Protesters including Rouch, Chabrol and Godard

'hung' in the exhibition space, alongside visual art works in diverse media and styles, with pieces by Léopold Survage (*Rythmes colorés* or *Coloured Rhythms*, 1913) and Oskar Fischinger (*Kreise* or *Circles*, 1933), as well as more recent creations by Paul Sharits (*Filmstrip Collage*, 1972) or Pierre Bismuth (*Following the Right Hand of Greta Garbo in 'Flesh and the Devil'*, 2008).

The final space is devoted to Henri Langlois's own major 'plastic' creation, ie his work as a designer of film museums and cinema-related exhibitions. We reach this sixth room, however, via Langlois's only known attempt at experimental filmmaking: his 1934 collaboration with Georges Franju, *Le Métro*, a creative exploration of the Parisian underground as a vehicle of modernist experience. Following this passage, we discover the secret cabinet of Langlois's inner mind. Here the walls display a few rare examples of the hundreds of sketches, plans, designs, lists, maps and genealogical tables that Langlois obsessively scribbled and scratched, coloured and corrected, throughout his working life. These pieces are graphically quite stunning and they would justify an entire exhibition or art-book devoted to them alone. To me they reveal the grain of madness or sublime obsession at the heart of Langlois's cinephile vision. He appears like some mad prince-architect endlessly designing and redesigning

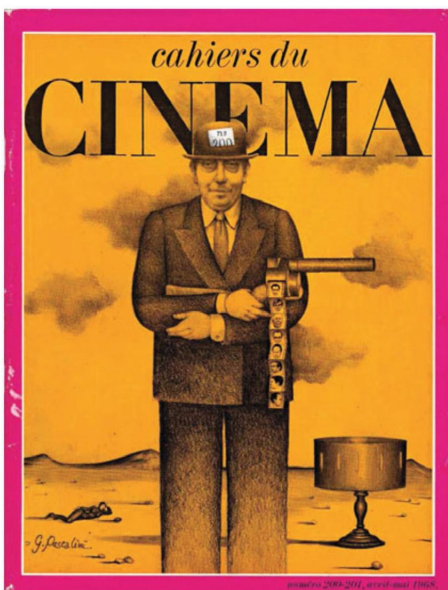
the imaginary castle in which he dreamed of living, or indeed lived in order to dream. In Langlois's case, of course, when the dreamer awoke, he still held a celluloid crown in his hands, as evidence of the reality of his dream...

Finally, as Paini and I leave the exhibition spaces, still strewn with paintings on the floor and objects waiting to be hung ("This is where I'm going to put the Duchamp *Rotoreliefs* when they arrive" is a phrase that will stay with me for a while), I recognise two actual moving images of Langlois that bid us farewell. One is the celebrated final sequence-shot from Pierre-André Boutang's *Conversation with Henri Langlois* (1975) showing Langlois walking slowly through the corridors of his museum. The other is the famous opening title-sequence of the French television series *Cinéastes de notre temps* (*Filmmakers of Our Time*) – like Henri Foucault's piece in the corridor leading to the first room of the exhibition, this sequence is composed of mini-screens, each showing a famous film director who had been featured in the series. The television screens successively go blank, one after the other, until all that is left in the middle of the screen is the image and voice of Langlois, who right on cue pronounces the phrase, "And that is the perfect title-sequence."

So the exhibition ends on a spiral effect, with the last piece echoing the first, like a giant film-loop installation. This way of ending is very much a beginning; it is the opening of an exploration, and an invitation to a new journey into the history of cinema and the visual arts.

What will the critics, or indeed the public, make of it all? Some may admire or adore it, others may detest it or remain indifferent. My own view, based on a breathless yet inspiring tour, is that the show expands and explores new dimensions of Langlois's extraordinary legacy, and that if we want to talk about 'exhibiting cinema' from now on, we will all have to take a walk through Dominique Paini's 'Imaginary Museum of Henri Langlois'.

**i** 'The Imaginary Museum of Henri Langlois' runs until 3 August at the Cinémathèque française, Paris



In 1968, *Cahiers* considered 'l'affaire Langlois'



A Cinémathèque poster by Fernand Léger



# BETTER THAN THE REAL THING



Acting on impulse: hired to contribute music in her capacity as a soundtrack composer, Blakley found herself cast as vulnerable country star Barbara Jean

Ronee Blakley's albums provided the soundtrack to Robert Altman's *Nashville* but their shifts in tone hold more than curiosity value

## By Frances Morgan

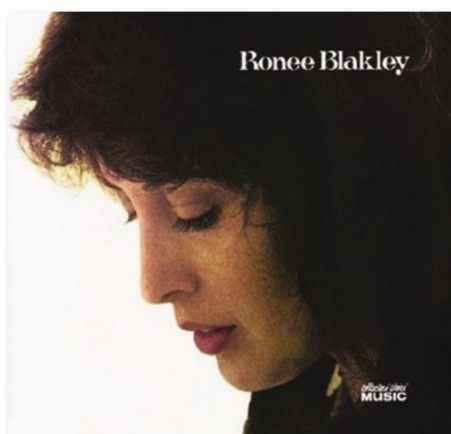
Talking about *The Long Goodbye* in *Altman on Altman*, the director tells David Thompson: "I've always said at the beginning of conceiving a film, 'I'd love the music to be indigenous, so that there's not going to be any violins that you can't see, that it won't come from nowhere.'" Indigenous, here used synonymously with diegetic, is an interesting choice of word, especially with regard to his documentary-style portrait of the country-music industry in *Nashville* (1975). The film revolves around its songs, which, famously, are all originals – if not written expressly for the film then at least unused in any others. The effect of this is to enfold the viewer seamlessly into the narrative: they are never reminded of where else they know this or that song from, yet – cued by the reactions of the audiences in the Grand Ole Opry and elsewhere – believe that they are in fact hearing well-loved hits. But the songs are also what make *Nashville* less 'real' and strengthen its satirical charge; something's not right about the lyrics or off in the performance, slightly exaggerated even by the genre's standards. As Altman says, "The country-and-western people in Nashville said, 'Oh, the

music's terrible, it's no good'... They felt I should have used their stuff. But I was satirising them. Their stuff would have been too on the nose."

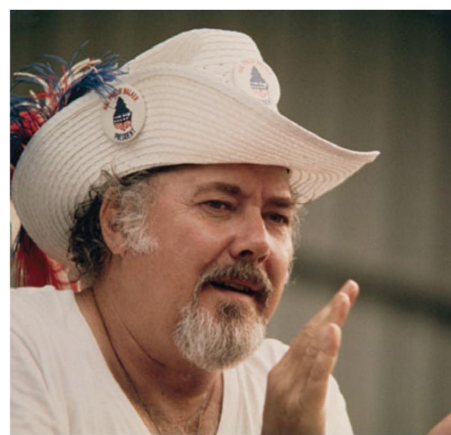
Unsurprisingly, *Nashville's* music has been written about extensively, with authors including Richard Ness and Helene Keyssar citing it as a means by which the film's potentially subversive race and gender politics are expressed. Historically it remains of interest too. The recent Criterion DVD reissue was accompanied by a number of online interviews with musician and actor Ronee Blakley, who penned seven of the songs as well as singing three. The professional soundtrack composer and songwriter was hired to contribute music and ended up in her first film role, playing

*The people in Nashville felt I should have used their music. But I was satirising them. Their stuff would have been too on the nose*

dazed, frail country star Barbara Jean (back on stage having been away, says a newsreader, "for special treatment"). In one of these interviews, Blakley muses on her musical background, which encompassed classical training, electronic music, folk and rock groups, and the soundtracking work that led to her involvement in *Nashville*: it's clear she was not 'from' country music but a musician



Altman liked Blakley's understated 1972 album



Robert Altman on the set of *Nashville*



able to respond to and work across the various styles the era and her job demanded. Altman first heard her songs, Blakley says, on an album she released on Elektra in 1972, and this understated record – mentioned usually as a peripheral detail to the film – provides an interesting counterpoint to her moving, instinctual and heightened performance in *Nashville*.

Fans of the film will recognise a number of songs on *Ronee Blakley* as well as its opener, 'Dues', the resigned ballad Barbara Jean sings just before sliding into a rambling monologue that reveals the extent of her mental distress to her fans. Blakley presents versions of songs sung by other characters: 'Down to the River', sung by two bluegrass hopefuls at an open mic and 'Bluebird', sung by Timothy Brown. But the album's highlights are less these genre pieces and more the classic Laurel Canyon cuts that owe a lot to Joni Mitchell and Judee Sill, with allusive lyrics and neat arrangements centring round rolling, open chords and runs on a crisply recorded piano. Blakley's high, slightly formal voice suits these tracks particularly well. 'Attachment' is a fragile ballad written from the point of view of a heroin addict, with a lush string arrangement; the wistful horizons of 'Along the Shore' are definitely those of Pacific shores rather than anywhere in Tennessee; 'Gabriel' is a quiet domestic vignette – lyrics about cats, rugs, phonecalls from friends – within an uplifting country soul composition. Elsewhere, 'Sleeping Sickness' and 'Fred Hampton', named for the Black Power activist, have a nimble verbosity and arch demeanour that brings to mind Dory Previn, also, of course, a songwriter-for-hire turned introspective singer of her own dramas.

There is something of the showreel about the album, although far less so than on 1975's *Welcome*, which contained Blakley's other songs from *Nashville* as well as 'Need a New Sun Rising', which features in the film of Bob Dylan's 'Rolling Thunder Revue' tour (Blakley was one of the tour's backup singers and appeared in *Renaldo & Clara* with Dylan in 1977). But *Ronee Blakley*'s slippages between mood and style fit alongside the elisions in Blakley's performances of her own songs in *Nashville*, which aren't just indicative of her inexperience as an actor or her character's state of mind but of the songs' emergence from the certainty of the recording studio into a place where they will be judged not only on their quality but their acting skills too – how well will they hold up as imagined country-and-western hits?

Altman says *Nashville*'s songs satirise the country industry and they do; but they also serve as a commentary on the art of songwriting itself at a time in popular music's history when the singer-songwriter was emerging into the light, the creator and performer increasingly expected to be the same person. Hearing those familiar soundtrack numbers in the context of the much more personal compositions on Blakley's album gives us a new way to hear the film itself, as we watch her singing songs she wrote in the persona of a character she never expected to end up playing. ☺

**i** *Nashville* is out on DVD and Blu-ray from Eureka/Masters of Cinema on 26 May

## PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

Over the course of a single year a century ago, Cecil B. DeMille refined his craft and helped define Hollywood



By David Cairns

One hundred years ago, Cecil Blount DeMille made America's first feature film, *The Squaw Man* (actually, it's the second but Hobart Bosworth's *The Sea Wolf* is lost). He directed 10 more films that year and contrasting his first movie with one from 1915 shows the dizzying evolution of a disturbing sensibility.

DeMille, like D.W. Griffith before him, got in to movies out of desperation, after failing comprehensively on the stage. His showmanship and ballyhoo would make him the most recognised name in screen direction, a byword for biblical bombast, but as he prepared to make his first epic, he had never been on a film set and he had never seen a film. Swiftly correcting both omissions, he also hired an experienced co-director.

*The Squaw Man* sends an English aristocrat (Dustin Farnum) out west, fleeing financial scandal. Attractive locations, near Hollywood, count for plenty since the film is locked into long-shot framing. But the distance is helpful as Farnum barnstorms at us: in scenes of high emotion, he's apt to shut his eyes in pain and raise a protective forearm in front of his face.

As love interest, DeMille cast 'Princess' Red Wing, a full-blooded Winnebago – a surprisingly advanced choice since such relationships were usually neutralised by casting white actors. Red Wing's dialogue is basic: one intertitle reads, "Me kill um." But her straightforward performance looks modern next to Farnum's posturing. Unfortunately, her role consists of getting the hero out of trouble, giving him a son and promptly dying when she's become inconvenient to the course of true (Anglo-Saxon) love: Madame Butterfly with a six-shooter.

DeMille (sometimes) acknowledged Griffith's influence in teaching cinema how to "photograph thought" via the close-up. *The Squaw Man* hasn't discovered this, instead crowding the screen with actors acting. But DeMille does grasp another piece of the puzzle: the POV. Farnum glances at his fiancée: a cut provides us with a closer view and an insight into his emotions. Later, leafing through a magazine, he sees her face superimposed over that of a woman in an illustration. The poor dope still doesn't merit a reaction shot but we've accessed his heart's yearning via double exposure.

DeMille was soon directing solo, discovering film language and to some extent inventing it. In 1915, *The Cheat* was hailed as a masterpiece. It's also an overblown, outrageously racist melodrama, but its use of film is sophisticated. It engages. It scoots along.

A spendthrift society lady (Fannie Ward) embezzles from a charity and, to recover the

*As DeMille prepared to make his first epic, he had never been on a film set and had never seen a film*



Out west: DeMille's *The Squaw Man*

lost cash, promises herself to a member of "the smart set" (Sessue Hayakawa, decades before *The Bridge on the River Kwai*). When she tries to buy her way out of their sex pact, he puts his mark on her with a branding iron.

From the start, the film traffics in luxury and sadism overlaid with sanctimony – the pungent essence of all DeMille's future hits. Hayakawa is introduced wielding his branding iron, a tease aimed at audiences familiar with the source play. Turning out the lights, he is satanically illuminated by a brazier, a dramatic use of source lighting DeMille had developed in his previous westerns.

Winning at the heroine's indulgence in new frocks, the film still revels in Ward's wardrobe. Eventually, ancient-world settings would allow DeMille to indulge in limitless opulence but for now he's content with his own peculiar vision of modern America: blood-and-thunder theatrics yoked to a Fellini-esque fashion parade.

DeMille's use of actors has advanced: Ward channels her hysteria, and Hayakawa is downright subtle, giving no hint of his lust and perfidy until the scenario requires it. hilariously, horribly, his shrine to Buddha is served up as signifier of his exotic wickedness.

DeMille helps his actors along by moving them closer to the camera, and with skillfully timed reaction cutaways. His cross-cutting goes beyond running parallel narratives to reveal psychological connections between characters. And for the horrific branding, he jumps straight in to his biggest close-up, both to discreetly frame out the searing of flesh and to leer at Hayakawa's contorted features.

Though DeMille's film is clearly racist, it isn't a tract like Griffith's later *The Birth of a Nation*. With a title that condemns the heroine, and a villain who isn't entirely an embodiment of his race, the director leaves a tiny amount of wriggle-room. Not often credited as a sophisticate, he has a shrewd sense of there being value in ambiguity.

In a single year, DeMille has taken Hollywood cinema to where it will stay: a lurid dreamworld whose camera-eye vacillates between gloating and condemning, where offensive ideologies are both indulged and questioned, and the filmmaker prances around in riding boots and puttees so fast nobody can get a bead on him. ☺



# STUCK IN PAUSE



Night rider: in films such as *CENTER JENNY*, Trecartin presents a map of a commodified emotional landscape organised by the rhythm and beats of the club

Marked by both hyper-acceleration and inertia, Ryan Trecartin's movies offer windows on to an absurdly amplified 'future now'

**By John Beagles**

In her controversial *Artforum* article *Digital Divide* (2012), critic Claire Bishop argued that the art world appears to operate in a state of disavowal when it comes to the impact of digital culture. One of the few non-Luddite artists Bishop did cite was American Ryan Trecartin. Trecartin, who frequently discusses how he "wants to push where we're at at the moment", produces movies (he doesn't like the term video) that seek to "capture the vibrations" of a hyper-connected and networked "age of intensity and anxiety".

Trecartin, whose work was exhibited at New York's MOMA in 2011, first came to prominence with *A Family Finds Entertainment* (2004). This work, alongside key pieces such as *I-Be Area* (2007) and *Item Falls* (2013), explores and embraces the post-human possibilities of a digitally decentred, hybrid self. Trecartin's prophetic and symptomatic movies picture the effects of the splintering of the self away from the material body and into the multiple realities of digital culture's baroque online spaces. Like that of predecessors such as Warhol, Koons and, most importantly for Trecartin,

Cindy Sherman, his works are excessive, accelerated amplifications and maps of what he refers to in interviews as the 'future now'.

One recently developed marker of the onslaught of the future now is reading software, which aims to increase human reading speed by up to 40 per cent (read a book in an hour!). Purchasing this software might be useful for speed-surfing the internet to note the spread of the meme of accelerationism. In recent months, there has been a seemingly endless, exponentially multiplying list of books, journals, talks and conferences on this critical strategy, which, as the philosopher Benjamin Noys has written, embraces the idea of 'the worse the better'.

Reading through recent texts such as Alex Williams's and Nick Srnicek's *Accelerate Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics* (2013), it is difficult not to make a connection to Trecartin's practice. Rejecting the convention of resisting (slowing down) the dehumanising drives of technological capitalism from a position of autonomy and critical distance, Trecartin's movies, in true accelerationist style, propose that the "cure is more of the disease". Counterintuitively, an accelerationist artist such as Trecartin wholeheartedly plugs in to the ravaging drives of capital, injecting its pathogens, imbibing its dehumanising effects, seeing within capitalism's developments the potential for a Promethean reimagining of the self, and by extension a radicalised future society. The markers of

Trecartin's high-risk, potentially subversive provocation – like Warhol's, Koons's or Sherman's – are exuberant over-identification, non-ironic blank parody and grotesque absurdism. Writing about Koons's and Sherman's Faustian pact with celebrity and commodity culture in the 1980s, the critic Hal Foster remarked that they were entangled in a "suicidal embrace". As a consequence of his own suicidal embrace with the world of digital-consumerist entertainment spectacle, Trecartin has quickly discovered that statements such as "capitulation is sexy when you land on the right vibrations" reap accusations of uncritical complicity from certain sectors of the 'art community'.

Created with long-term collaborator Lizzie Fitch, Trecartin's movies are all available online at Vimeo and YouTube. Each is constructed from highly edited frenetic handheld POV footage of an ensemble cast of characters, digitally processed to the point of implosion under the weight of layered digital effects, 3D animation and mashed-up, auto-tuned, speeded up dialogue and music. They are exhausting in their unbridled, excessive sonic and visual intensity. For example, *Item Falls* features staccato jump-cut edits that flip between tracking the beats of a dubstep soundtrack and taking their cue from the excessive eye twitches of one of the film's characters. Not surprisingly, Trecartin's movies routinely go over the edge, becoming dizzyingly impressionistic and abstract in their cartoon-like barrage of fast



talking, lightning editing and morphing bodies.

Trecartin has spoken of his interest in mapping a traumatic, transitional moment in the culture; nowhere is this clearer than in his characters' accelerated use of words. His heavily scripted 'musical' texts fuse the banal platitudes and aspirational slogans of consumerism with acid put-downs ("beeeitch!"). "She has a word problem," one of the characters in *Any Ever* (2009) remarks. "I just feel the need to redefine everything." This ravenous hunger to map the mutating character of language infects Trecartin's movies. His use of metronomic repetition empties familiar words of any residue of meaning they might possess. A transitional traumatic moment indeed.

As with McLuhan's seminal text, the medium is frequently the message in Trecartin's work; its aesthetic puts me in mind of the film theorist Steven Shaviro's term 'delirious aestheticism'. Indeed, Shaviro's own work on accelerationism, both in his book *Post-Cinematic Affect* (2010) and, more recently, in his online lectures on *Post-Continuity Cinema*, have a real connection with Trecartin's films. For instance, in his analysis of Harmony Korine's *Spring Breakers*—perhaps the best example of a mainstream film with accelerationist tendencies—Shaviro details what he regards as a significant shift in the film's formal, organising structures, where narrative coherence and spatial organisation noticeably deviate from established classical modes. As he writes, post-continuity editing is orientated not towards the production of meaning but "moment-by-moment manipulation of the spectator's affective states". For Shaviro, in the "liquid narratives" of post-continuity cinema, immediate visceral affects trump overall coherence—an arthouse variant of Matthias Stork's idea of 'chaos cinema'. In the imaginative space of such films, atemporality dominates, with a succession of images looping and repeating in a mesmeric, hallucinogenic ebb and flow of intense peaks and bottomed-out lows. Drawing on the work of theorist Robin James, Shaviro notes the similarities between this orchestration of affect and dance music, specifically the building of peaks and troughs along a sine wave of fluctuating intensity and silence. Trecartin's movies operate with this logic in films such as *The Re'Search* (2010) and *CENTER JENNY* (2013), where his map of a commodified emotional landscape appears organised by the beat and rhythm of the club. In this respect, as Shaviro and others note, the accelerationist mode is the amped-up aesthetic of post-Fordist precarious capitalism, under which, as Italian theorist Franco Berardi has written in *The Soul at Work*, we live in a bipolar economy swinging from euphoria to panic, hyper-enthusiasm to dissociative disengagement. The modulations along this sine wave fill Trecartin's movies. His characters max out then crash and burn, then max out then crash and burn then...

In terms of content, Trecartin's characters are often like corporeal versions of digital avatars. Yet figures such as Pasta in *I-Be Area* or Cindy Career in *Ready (Re'Search Wait'S)* (2009) are not 'the beautiful people' but boringly normal in their fleshy imperfections and deviations from celebrity symmetry. While there's no traditional naturalism—the grotesque make-up gives these

## *Despite Trecartin's protestations of utopian digital zeal, it's hard not to look upon his characters as inhabiting a new circle of hell*

figures the semblance of computer-game or cartoon characters—the clothes and physical spaces his meat avatars inhabit are clearly coded as middle to lower-middle class. Here, Trecartin's staging of the paradoxes in today's "traumatic moment" comes to the fore. After all, a genuinely accelerated life is clearly the preserve of the hyper-privileged people outside of 'society', the 0.1 per cent who really get to live out the capitalist dream and injunction to live life to the max. Consequently, although Trecartin has said that he doesn't regard characters such as Pasta or Cindy Career as alienated, the pathologies they present make it difficult not to read the movies as playing out, often in a hysterical, violent manner (each one contains random moments of destruction), the intense daily anxieties and frustrations produced by the gap between access to a digital realm of fantasy and 'opportunity' and a decelerated social sphere of endless inertia and devastating class division. The fact that Pasta and Cindy Career's subjectivity is distinct from the dominant white male heterosexual (AKA 'feminine') makes this all the more pointed. A character like Daisy in *I-Be Area* may be constantly stimulated by the sensation of speed but it is only a sensation because, unlike real speed, it is unshackled from directional movement. As one of the characters says: "You are stuck in pause."

The interior location of this inaction is telling. Firstly, because the rooms and all the characters in them operate as the embodied offline versions of fragmented online personalities—the splintered digital self and all its avatars are brought together, temporarily made meat. The interior space also resonates because, as the critic Hannah Black has remarked about the popular accelerationist internet character Overly Attached Girlfriend (OAG), "the tragic heroine of melodrama belongs to the interior". Trecartin's figuring of this entrapment of the feminine collective

psyche is certainly intense in its melodrama. If Trecartin's interior spaces do represent the various manifestations of a digitally decentred self, it is nightmarish in its recombination of these 'parts'. All the characters in Trecartin's movies are hyper-anxious, agitated and over-stimulated. Continually trying to wrestle with their manufactured, infantilised desires, there's a bleak desperation in their attempts to be what Foucault called entrepreneurs of the self. Pointedly, and despite Trecartin's contrary protestations of positive utopian digital zeal, it's hard not to look upon his characters as inhabiting a new circle of hell. Being plugged in, participating all the time, clearly isn't good for their mental health. The loss of Eros in everyday life appears acute in Trecartin's world. To borrow from the title of Sherry Turkle's seminal survey of the impact of digital culture on daily lives, all Trecartin's characters are 'alone together'.

Trecartin's retweeting of the pathologies of the 'future now' frequently runs the same risk as many another accelerationist. In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari remarked that "art is not chaos, but a composition of chaos", a form that "creates semiotic devices capable of translating the infinite velocity of reality flows into the slow rhythm of sensibility". At times, Trecartin appears too enraptured with the noise, speed and buzz of the 'future now', the movies operating only on the level of a brutal, chaotic visceral assault on the viewer. While there's often a dark pleasure to be had from the accelerated excesses of this visual and sonic offensive, not least in its undercutting of many of the dominant regimes of good taste in contemporary video art, without sufficient modulation, Trecartin's translations are often no more than repetition with minimal difference, a restaging that appears comfortable just impressionistically mapping the surface effects of digital culture. However, when he fluctuates his sine wave, dipping between the delirious highs and death-grip lows of our anxious era, he manages to produce an accelerated, more subversive and compelling flash of the 'future now'; a timely vision that nails a logic of desire perched between its peaks of good vibrations and troughs of depressive dissociation. ☹



**Amped up:** *The Re'Search*, like other Trecartin films, features fragmented personalities in interior spaces





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Jonathan Romney, SCREEN INTERNATIONAL



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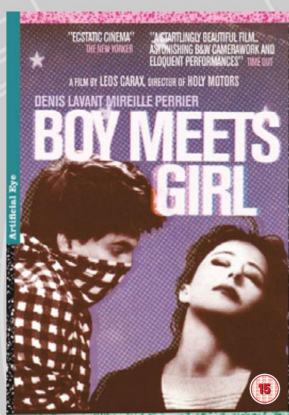
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# Reviews



## 82 **Pompeii**

*Given how the fiery, panic-ridden destruction of a city has become a staple event in everything from superhero blockbusters to 'bro' comedies, it's surprising that it took so long for this post-9/11 cycle of urban calamity to get around to one of history's greatest kabooms*



**60** Films of the month



**66** Films



**94** Home Cinema



**104** Books





'Beautiful people doing bad things in nice rooms': Lindsay Lohan as Tara, with James Deen as her rich boyfriend Christian in Paul Schrader's *The Canyons*

## The Canyons

USA 2013

Director: Paul Schrader

Certificate: not submitted 96m

### Reviewed by Tony Rayns

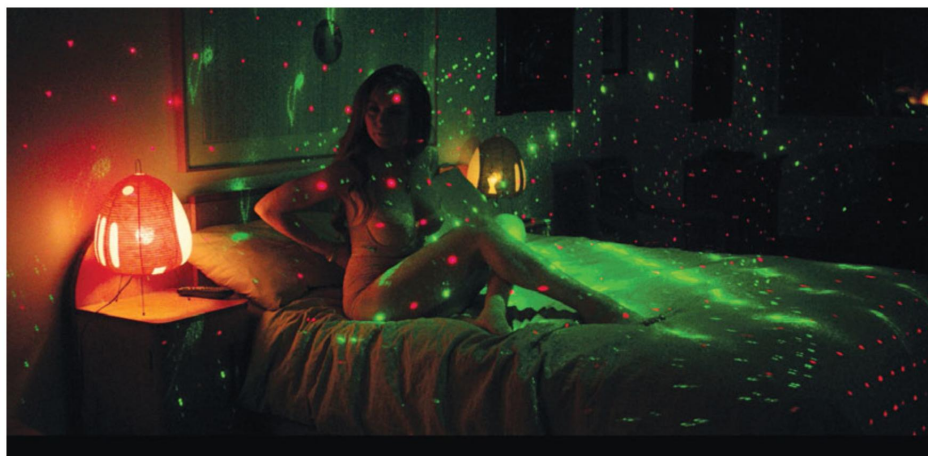
In more ways than one, *The Canyons* takes us back into *Showgirls* territory. For his (not very) original script, Bret Easton Ellis has come up with a gang of Los Angeles stereotypes: a rich kid who dabbles in low-budget film production to meet the terms of the paternal trust fund he lives on, a damaged girlfriend who values being "cared for" over loving or being loved, a provincial *ingénu* with a great body who can stomach being gay-for-pay if it will help get him his career break, plus a flotsam of desperate would-be producers, young swingers, wronged and vengeful yoga instructors and so on. All of them are highly sexed, cramming more condomless-but-STI-free coitus into every day than you or I manage in a week. The improbably compacted plot (the main action spans just three days) turns on patterns of dominance and submission, leading into a revenge motif which provokes the ending of one life and the vindictive destruction of at least one other. Risible? I should coco.

According to Ben Child in the *Guardian*, Ellis is somewhat disappointed with the result. Speaking after the film had been rejected by both Sundance and the South by Southwest festival, he was

quoted as saying, "The film is so languorous. It's an hour 30 and it seems like it's three hours long. I saw this as a pranky *noirish* thriller but Schrader turned it into, well, a Schrader film." As Ellis's comment suggests, the production's backstory is quite a bit more interesting than the film itself.

Once he'd cut his teeth on scripts for other movie-brats, ex-critic and ex-theology-major Paul Schrader became a committed writer-director, an auteur working out his personal issues through his fictional constructs – always with a keen instinct for eye-catching collaborators. He had his share of early setbacks: *Rolling Thunder*

(1977), intended as his directorial debut, was snatched away from him, and Columbia Pictures forced him to change the ending of *Hardcore* (1979). After his third feature *American Gigolo* (1980), though – a film which, as Lili Anolik points out in a neat piece in the *Believer*, predicts pretty much everything Bret Easton Ellis has ever written – he ran out of narcissist, crypto-gay and crypto-spiritual issues to explore and turned with relief to someone else's script to make *Cat People* (1982). Since then, in a well-chequered career, he has shuttled between his own writing (*Mishima*, *Light Sleeper*, *The Walker*)



Bedtime story: Lohan was first considered to play yoga instructor Cynthia but demanded the lead role





and other people's (*The Comfort of Strangers*, *Auto Focus* and now this). Pushing 70 (he was born in 1946), he's still fighting the good fight to get attention-grabbers on the screen, even if that means working with Bret Easton Ellis, Hollywood casualty Lindsay Lohan and beyond-prolific porn star James Deen, who has delivered more money-shots than any man alive.

*The Canyons* was a bounce-back project undertaken when *Bait*, a previous script by Ellis which Schrader tried to float with Spanish money hit the rocks. (Schrader told Larry Gross in *Film Comment* that it was his second project in a row to go under at the last minute.) Licking their wounds, Schrader and Ellis decided to go for a self-financed quickie; Schrader says he told Ellis, "What you do isn't that expensive. Beautiful people, nice rooms, bad things, and sharp talk. How expensive is that?" They put up \$90,000 themselves, wrangled over the risks of casting Lohan and Deen, cast most of the other roles from 648 auditions posted on the Let It Cast website, and were then persuaded to raise more money through Kickstarter. The film eventually cost around \$250,000; everyone got paid minimum wage and they made it a point of principle that they wouldn't shell out for locations. Lohan was first considered for the role of yoga instructor Cynthia but demanded the lead role of Tara, the emotionally fraught woman who has sex with both her rich boyfriend Christian and the naive hick Ryan, not to mention the assorted one-night-

stand swingers brought into their relationship by Christian. Ellis tweeted that he was modelling the character of Christian on James Deen and succeeded in catching the attention of Deen himself, who enthusiastically joined the project and provided his own expensive car as a prop.

To Schrader, *The Canyons* must have seemed – maybe even consciously – a logical follow-on from his many earlier accounts of vacuous lives, not to mention his studies of men with emotional blockages who are forced to feel by their involvement in murder cases. Since the story was set in Los Angeles, it also offered the chance to add another chapter to his ongoing excoriation of the lamentable state of the movie business. Not content with characters who flirt with movie-making as casually as they manage their shopping and fucking, Schrader tops and tails the film with images of derelict movie-theatres. He also uses such images as backgrounds to the 'Monday', 'Tuesday' and 'Wednesday' chapter titles, but then he never was one to shy away from overstatement. What the boarded-up exteriors and stripped-out projection booths have to do with Christian's half-hearted investment in a low-budget slasher movie to be shot in New Mexico is anyone's guess, but it's clear that – 40-odd years after *The Last Picture Show* – Schrader remains hung up on the end of the great days of industrial filmmaking and distribution.

The problem is (and this is where we come back to *Showgirls*) there is an evident mismatch between the director's ambitions and the writer's: between Schrader's grizzled movie-buff consciousness (plus his consistently appalled/fascinated view of sexual licence) and Bret Easton Ellis's gung-ho approach to bisexual depravity and B-movie thrills. Ellis no doubt did set out to write a "pranky *noirish* thriller", but the script he gave Schrader is very much what the director predicted: scenes of beautiful people doing bad things in nice rooms, to the power of ten. The film is ultimately as limited and repetitive as a soap opera. Christian, a sadistic control freak who hates and resents his absent father, blights the lives of everyone in his immediate circle, right down to the young private eye who gets beaten up for following Ryan. Christian's machinations are mechanical and soulless, an endless cycle of car, home, office, bar, websites, texts, phonecalls and unnegotiated



Lohan in *The Canyons*

## There is a mismatch between Schrader's grizzled movie-buff consciousness and Ellis's gung-ho approach to bisexual depravity and B-movie thrills

sex. As a critique of certain lifestyles, this is no less one-dimensional than *American Psycho*.

Following the *Showgirls* template, the ultimate narrative focus is on the rube Ryan. Like Schrader himself, Ryan has come from Michigan to Los Angeles in search of filmbiz success; he also shares Schrader's touching faith in true love, and can't understand why Tara has traded poverty with him for affluence with Christian – or why she tolerates Christian's thing for random swingers. The film opens and closes with close-ups of Ryan, first aghast in the Chateau Marmont bar as he watches Christian bully Tara, last in some dingy, anonymous room as he takes a call about Tara's state of mind. But Ryan is not – and never could be – the 'star' of this story, and not only because the unknown Nolan Funk, who plays him, can't match the X-factors of Lohan and Deen. Both leads turn in fine performances, which come close to bringing alive the sado-masochist gestalt of Christian and Tara's co-dependent relationship – as does Gus van Sant in his sinister cameo as Christian's shrink, with a portrait of T.S. Eliot hanging on the wall of his consulting room. Schrader, still in love with the visual fireworks of *The Conformist*, does his best to liven things up with his usual dolly-ing arabesques and crane shots. But the script is risible. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Braxton Pope  
**Written by**  
Bret Easton Ellis  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
John Defazio  
**Editor**  
Tim Silano  
**Production Designer**  
Stephanie J. Gordon  
**Original Music**

Brendan Canning  
**Sound Mixer**  
Michael Miramontes  
**Costume Designer**  
Keely Crum

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Fox production  
Produced in  
association with  
Prettybird Pictures  
A Filmworks FX  
production  
A Paul Schrader film

#### CAST

Lindsay Lohan  
Tara

James Deen  
Christian  
Nolan Funk  
Ryan  
Amanda Brooks  
Gina  
Tenille Houston  
Cynthia  
Gus van Sant  
Dr Campbell  
Jarod Einsohn  
hoodie guy

Chris Zeischegg  
Reed  
Victor of Aquitaine  
Randall  
Jim Boeven  
Jon  
Phil Pavel  
Erik  
Lauren Schacher  
Caitlin

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Jade Films

Not submitted  
for theatrical  
classification  
Video certificate: 18  
Running time: 96m 2s

**Los Angeles.** Christian and his girlfriend Tara meet film producer Gina, about to shoot a slasher movie with Christian's investment, and her boyfriend Ryan, who will play the lead. Christian is supported by his rich father on condition that he works and sees the shrink Dr Campbell once a week. Ryan is Tara's former boyfriend, and they have resumed a secret liaison. Christian (who likes to spice up their sex life with strangers) suspects Tara of infidelity and has a private eye follow her. Christian visits his ex, yoga instructor Cynthia, for sex; they argue and she throws him out. Having identified his prey, Christian starts punishing Ryan, first by tricking him into a sexual encounter with gay producer Jon, then by hacking

his online profile and bank account. Cynthia contacts Tara and says she was once the victim of a gang-rape instigated and filmed by Christian. Christian brings in a young couple for sex but is dismayed when Tara forces him into gay sex with the boy. Next day, Ryan tells Gina that the movie is off because of his affair with Tara; Gina throws him out. Christian confronts Tara. After his visit to Dr Campbell, Christian murders Cynthia for telling lies about him and later finds Tara packed to leave; he lets her go on promising to provide an alibi for him – and never to see Ryan again. Months later, Tara meets Caitlin who asks her about the unsolved murder; Caitlin reports on Tara to the haunted Ryan.



## Frank

Ireland/United Kingdom 2013

Director: Lenny Abrahamson

Certificate 15 94m 58s

**Reviewed by Ryan Gilbey**

**Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist**

Frank Sidebottom is a musical performer who combined parched Mancunian wit with avant-garde nuttiness and vaudevillian showmanship. His most striking feature was his spherical papier-mâché head with its painted-on features: saucer-sized blue eyes, pursed ruby lips and slicked-down, side-parted black hair. Created and portrayed by the late Chris Sievey, who died in 2010 aged 54, he epitomised the northern overlap between indie, punk and music hall along with the likes of Half Man Half Biscuit, John Cooper Clarke, Vic Reeves and Peter Kay's *Phoenix Nights*.

The journalist, author and broadcaster Jon Ronson wrote an article about his own spell in the late 1980s as a keyboard player in Frank's Oh Blimey Big Band. This has now become the basis for *Frank*, co-written by Ronson and Peter Straughan (who collaborated previously on a screen adaptation of Ronson's non-fiction book *The Men Who Stare at Goats*). It marks a return to the study of tensions between the marginal and the mainstream for the Irish director Lenny Abrahamson. His last picture, *What Richard Did* (2012), focused on a young rugby player whose dazzling prospects are jeopardised when he commits a spontaneous act of violence. Prior to that, Abrahamson's protagonists had been outsiders: the junkies of *Adam & Paul* (2004), the petrol-station attendant with learning difficulties in *Garage* (2007). Like those characters, Frank is at once in the world and hidden from it. Sequestered within that cartoon head he is simultaneously eye-catching and invisible.

The film, which is dedicated to Sievey, retains the rudiments of Frank's story; other aspects have been fictionalised. Frank is now American, while the music of his group The Soronprfbz (it's a running joke that even the band members don't know how to pronounce the name) exudes not the real Frank's amateurish Bontempi sensibility but the chugging, single-minded grind associated with The Fall or Krautrock bands Neu! and Can. Meanwhile his psychological condition aligns him with rock dropouts and outsiders such as Daniel Johnston and Syd Barrett. "What happened to him?" asks Jon (Domhnall Gleeson), the band's keyboard player, near the end of the picture. "Nothing 'happened' to him," Frank's father replies, deflating any zaniness that has accumulated. "He has a mental illness."

It isn't exactly that this fact has been kept from us – more that it is one of several uncomfortable truths the film cleverly hides in plain sight. Until the final scenes, Frank's behaviour is played either for laughs or a plangent strangeness. A pleasurable baggy section in the middle of the picture is devoted to a year-long recording session at a remote log cabin, where Frank's mixture of perfectionism and eccentricity becomes both liberation and endurance test for the band. Its manager Don (Scoot McNairy) even commits suicide at the end of it, hanging himself while wearing one of Frank's false heads, initially prompting fears that Frank himself is dead.

This idea of proxies, substitutes and inauthentic copies runs through the film. Jon is a replacement for the original keyboardist,

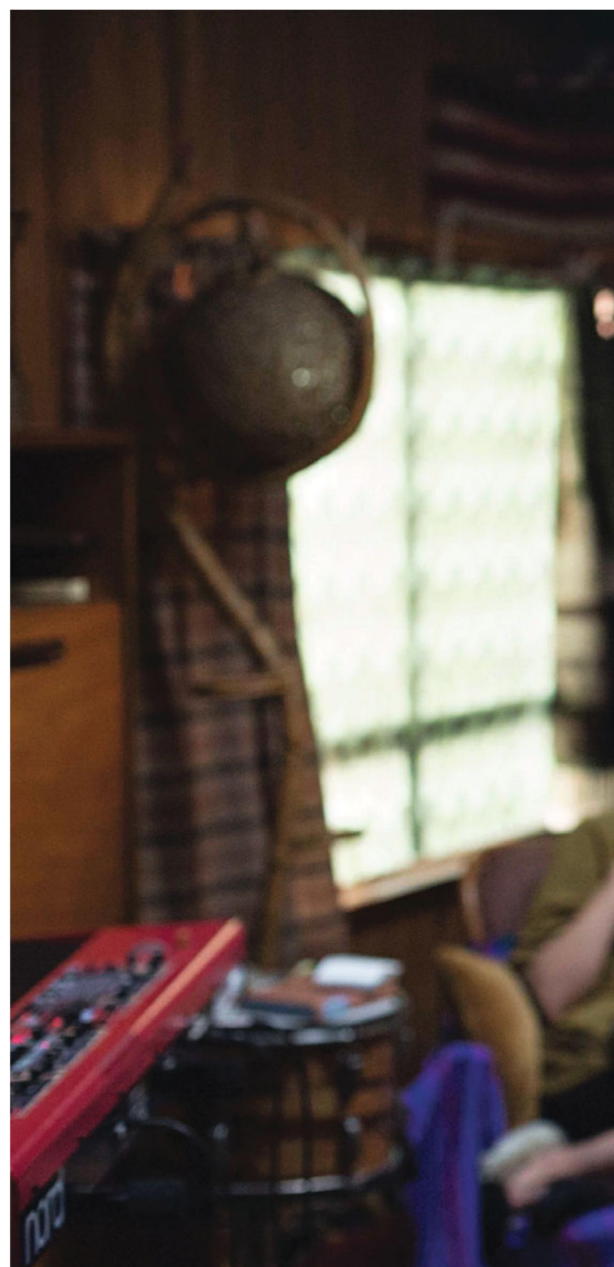
who tries to drown himself after suffering a breakdown. The sea always plays a pivotal part in Abrahamson's work – there were deaths in or beside water in *Adam & Paul* and *Garage*, and an important beach scene in *What Richard Did* – so it's significant that *Frank* starts with this near-death by drowning and later features a Norse-style funeral on a lake. Staring out to sea, Jon attempts to compose songs in his head in a series of painfully bad musical doodles to which we alone are privy. This leads to a breakthrough moment when he appears to have hit on a brilliant chord sequence, only for him to realise dejectedly that it is merely ripped off from 'It Must Be Love', which he was listening to only moments before. (Interestingly, Jon calls it "Madness's 'It Must Be Love'" – another reference to copies, since the original version is by Labi Siffre.)

Duplicates lurk in every corner of the film, beginning with Frank's artificial head. To anyone who objects that his face is weird, he counters that real ones are just as odd. As if to prove that point, his bandmate and protector/enabler Clara (Maggie Gyllenhaal) has a face that seems even more immobile than Frank's illustrated one. (Her severely cut black bob also resembles a parody of his 'hairstyle'.) "Would it help if I said my facial expressions out loud?" Frank asks Jon, offering by way of example "Welcoming smile" and "Big, non-threatening grin". No wonder some members of the entourage have trouble distinguishing between real and bogus, human and artificial – Don, for example, has a penchant for sex with mannequins. Even in death, Don does not escape the curse of the copy: believing themselves to be scattering his ashes in the desert, his friends discover too late that they are instead distributing handfuls of Grownut powder.

This extends to the relationship between reality and pretence within the filmmaking process. *Frank* is, after all, a kind of deliberate biopic manqué: the Frank Sidebottom story and yet not. But it is also a celebration of uniqueness. Its actors are not only portraying musicians – as with *Nashville*, all the music we see and hear being performed by the onscreen band is being played by the people on screen. A more pressing question of authenticity is bound to surround any film in which a major star spends the bulk of his screen time with his face hidden. Given that Frank's head stays on for all but two scenes, it will be a trusting viewer who doesn't wonder even for a second whether it's really Michael Fassbender under there all along. It would be unfair to call the unveiling near the end of the film a failure of nerve, especially since Fassbender gives a finely textured performance both in and out of the head, but it's hard not to wish that some way had been found to preserve that tension – to keep us tantalised, even suspicious, to the last.

At least *Frank* has another, more insidious trick up its sleeve, which it is in no hurry to reveal. In the figure of Jon, the film has an obvious stand-in for the audience: he acts as our proxy, our bewildered eyes and ears, as he is drawn deeper into Frank's oddball world. The position of main character is a privileged one but it can also be deceptive. Jon is gradually shown to be spectacularly

**Maggie Gyllenhaal, Michael Fassbender, Domhnall Gleeson**



Head case: Michael Fassbender as Frank

*The idea of substitutes and inauthentic copies runs through the film, beginning with Frank's artificial head – but it is also a celebration of uniqueness*







## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**

Ed Guiney  
David Barron  
Stevie Lee

**Written by**

Jon Ronson  
Peter Straughan  
Based on the original  
newspaper article  
by Jon Ronson

**Director of**

Photography  
James Mather  
**Editor**

Nathan Nugent

**Production Designer**

Richard Bullock

**Music**

Stephen Rennicks

**Production**

**Sound Mixer**

Niall O'Sullivan

**Costume Designer**

Suzie Harman

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Companies**  
Film4, BFI,  
Protagonist Pictures,  
Bord Scannán na  
hÉireann/Irish Film  
Board present an  
Element Pictures/  
Runaway Fridge  
Films production  
A film by Lenny  
Abrahamson

**Executive Producers**

Tessa Ross  
Katherine Butler  
Andrew Lowe  
Nigel Williams

**CAST**

**Domhnall Gleeson**  
Jon Burroughs  
**Maggie Gyllenhaal**  
Clara  
**Scot McNairy**  
Don

**Michael Fassbender**

Frank  
**François Civil**  
Baraque  
**Carla Azar**  
Nana  
**Tess Harper**  
Frank's mom  
**Bruce McIntosh**  
Frank's dad  
**Haley Derryberry**  
Simone  
**Lauren Poole**  
Alice

**Dolby Digital  
In Colour  
[2.35:1]**

**Distributor**  
Artificial Eye  
Film Co. Ltd

**8,547 ft +0 frames**

When the keyboard player of the avant-garde group The Soronprfbs attempts to drown himself in an English coastal town, the band's manager Don recruits Jon, a budding musician who happens to be standing nearby, as the replacement. Jon meets the frontman, Frank, who wears at all times a giant papier-mâché head with a painted-on face, and the rest of the band, including the severe and imperious Clara, who is highly protective of Frank. That evening's gig ends in chaos but Jon's services are retained for an eccentric recording session in a remote log cabin, which lasts a year as Frank drives his band in pursuit of perfection. When the recording is finished, Don hangs himself and is cremated in a Viking-

style ceremony on the lake. Jon, who has been building the band's following online, steps in as manager and secures a slot at the US South by Southwest festival. He encourages Frank to write more accessible songs. Clara disapproves and takes off with Frank. She later stabs Jon when he finds them. Forced to go on stage accompanied only by Jon, Frank collapses mid-performance. At their motel, Jon tries to remove Frank's papier-mâché head. Frank flees and is hit by a car, but runs off. Jon, who is also knocked down, traces Frank to his parents' home, where he finally sees him without his fake head. Frank and Jon find the rest of the band performing in a club. Frank joins them in a heartfelt performance. Jon walks off alone.

under-talented. That much is made clear when Frank and Clara invite him to play some of the songs he claims to have written. To say that the bucket emerges empty from the well would be an understatement. But as Jon devotes his energy to posting surreptitious footage of the band on YouTube, and boosting his own Twitter following, his interests begin to diverge starkly from those of Frank and The Soronprfbs. Jon is commerce; Frank is art, perhaps even genius. The film is binary in its insistence that the two are unhappy bedfellows.

Jon may be a dope but he is a dangerous one, at least in this context, much like the budding young editor in Lisa Cholodenko's *High Art* (1998) who exploits the legendary, washed-up photographer with whom she starts an affair. Not only is Jon devoid of talent or originality, he is an actively negative, compromising influence on Frank. It was brave of Ronson to write his own onscreen surrogate as the villain of the piece, albeit an unacknowledged and inadvertent one. Braver still of the film to argue that the rest of us will never understand what it's like to be a genius, so we may as well stop trying to prise open the damaged heads of our heroes. **B**





Get with the program: Johnny Depp as artificial intelligence expert Will Caster, who has his mind uploaded to a computer

## Transcendence

USA/China 2014

Director: Wally Pfister

Certificate 12A 119m 6s

### Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

An event Hollywood sci-fi movie without aliens, robots or gun battles, *Transcendence* has a topical inevitability – it's as if, in keeping with the film's premise, the technological reality of 2014 had gathered and made a movie about itself. 'Ripped from the headlines' is now 'lifted from the cloud'. For many of us, the film's premise – the internet as maniacal über-brain, watching and controlling everything and everybody – will closely evoke the uneasiness we experienced last year or the year before about whatever bump in techno-craziness it was that crossed our inner boundaries but which we insisted on sublimating. Just contemplating how much autonomy, free time, culture and privacy we've surrendered over the past ten years or so, all in the name of technological progress and the convenience it bestows, can chill the blood, if you're so inclined. If you're not, you may be actively beckoning the

future, even as it invades your home, dreams and physiology. The argument, in and out of academia, often resembles a young-versus-old debate about music or body mods or extreme sports: should we value the conventional and sensible, or dive in and sacrifice everything for what's next, because it's destiny?

Certainly, we're looking at Philip K. Dick's under-the-skin prophecies coming mundanely and complacently true – so much so that *Transcendence* barely feels Dickian at all, because the twisted irony of things 'Dickian' is merely the new Google Glass normal. *Transcendence* welcomes all these perspectives into its rather shaky tent, and for that alone this pallid and self-serious genre trifle deserves some attention. Science fiction is a cultural app with many functions, even if its capacity for videogame imagery is all that usually seems to interest the Industry these days, and so an encouraging way to watch cinematographer Wally Pfister's directorial debut is to imagine it miles away from the 21st-century A-list and instead on a B-movie drive-in screen in the 60s, when genre pictures often had so few resources that pungent ideas became the only grist in the mill. For all its gloss, hipster

pretensions, plot craters and sometimes risible attempts at action, *Transcendence* traffics in large, troublesome ideas about Right Now and What's Ahead, even if the film itself is far too timid and compromised to do those hairy questions justice.

One shouldn't, I think, get too caught up in the fake techno-textures – the TED-ish conference on AI, the constantly scrolling code screens, the resorts to first-generation-laptop jargon – just as one wouldn't kvetch about the immobile phones in 2001: *A Space Odyssey*. In Pfister's scenario, from a seemingly worked-over screenplay by Jack Paglen, the arc is classic Frankenstein, and therefore both predictable and relevant. Johnny Depp's mumbly AI genius Dr Will Caster has his heartbroken wife Rebecca Hall upload his consciousness on to a mainframe from his deathbed, thereby freeing his brain to roam the internet and, almost immediately, exploit it for wealth, power and growth for growth's sake. The internet is, in the abstract, nothing if not an invitation to cosmic megalomania. You may, as I did, recall the queasy loss of control emanating from Joseph Sargent's Cold War nightmare *Colossus: The Forbin Project* (1970), about an aggressively sentient super-




computer – though Depp's mega-mind is more beneficent, perfecting nanotechnologies that heal human flesh and environmental scarring but instilling fear in dullard wetwares (buddy Paul Bettany, scientist Morgan Freeman, FBI shrugger Cillian Murphy) anyway, simply because of the limitless scope of his power.

As a society, must we embrace every computerised advance ever made? And if you think so, what socio-philosophical reasoning is there to support that presumption? Why isn't it worth weighing what's lost? Pfister's movie glances off a great many vexing issues, and though its old-school fear-of-science structure can seem half-baked, I'm glad a mainstream movie has dared to doubt the intractable goodness of virtual life. Unfortunately, this line of inquiry must turn political, and the film's narrative materials – primarily, a Luddite underground terrorist movement convinced of AI's pernicious evil and prone to assassinating scientists – are confused at best. Every character is saddled with a vague sense of wary suspicion about Caster's new incarnation as a super-program – even, eventually, Hall's tremulous love interest. But the closest thing to a point of view the film exhibits eventually settles with the terrorists, who succeed (not quite a spoiler, as it's made clear in the prologue) in wrecking the world's electronic infrastructure with a single intravenous injection.

An injection, we should point out, of software virus, which gives you an idea of *Transcendence's* vast plot holes and superhuman leaps of logic, which can spoil your engagement with the film's conceptual gameplay, just as logic voids can in nearly any Dick story. For most viewers, the problem with *Transcendence* will begin and end with Pfister's unschooled approach to dramaturgy, here savagely limited by the lifeless spectacle of people looking at and talking to computer screens, spouting bogus dialogue in explanation of cascading data we have no chance of gathering. When it does get interpersonal, Pfister sticks to his mentor Christopher Nolan's strategy of two people facing off in mid-shots, six feet apart in a shadowy space. It doesn't help that Depp, who puts in all of maybe three days' work in a largely supporting role, appears slurrily hungover throughout, even at the peak of health, leaving Hall with all the heavy lifting in the impossible role of a not-quite-obsessed obsessive who becomes understandably disenchanted, years on, with her virtual lover looking drowsily down at her from flat screens on every wall.

Nolan's influence is also felt in the editing room, in so far as every scene is trimmed to an abrupt fact-delivery blip, accumulating in an undramatic flow that's both hurried and lugubrious. Gaps in the story are left to gasp like fish on the dock. (Bettany's ambivalent crony gets kidnapped by the terrorists, and no one seems to notice, for years, while just the sheer mention of 'nano' something or other allows Caster's consciousness to alter matter at will – but only to an unexplained limit.) The details of the film are half scanted and half absurd, and in the US that vulnerability has doomed *Transcendence* to gang-predation by critics. But you can't help but wonder if the film's larger worries, even the unintentional and implicit ones (as in, are you sure that universal connectivity won't turn into a threat, and soon?), might not loom in time, as the veracity of minutiae becomes yesterday's gripe.

But maybe not. Like Spike Jonze's *Her*, *Transcendence* is so predicated on contemporary consumer technology that its thematic dynamics might be as outdated by 2015 as its programming particulars. The ten-minute-ahead sci-fi strategy has become strangely delicate, in a media culture where the hardware itself gets upgraded into obsolescence every 12 or 18 months. You watch: both films, one beloved so warmly and the other deplored so lazily, will in a few years be completely and equally forgotten. Reality will be something else. 

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Andrew A. Kosove  
Broderick Johnson  
Kate Cohen  
Marisa Polvino  
Annie Marter  
David Valdes  
Aaron Ryder

#### Written by

Jack Paglen

#### Director of Photography

Jess Hall

#### Edited by

David Rosenbloom

#### Production Designer

Chris Seagers

#### Music

Mychael Danna

#### Sound Mixer

Willie D. Burton

#### Costume Designer

George L. Little

#### Visual Effects

Double Negative

#### ©Alcon

Entertainment, LLC

#### Production Companies

Alcon Entertainment presents in association with DMG Entertainment a Straight Up Films production A Wally Pfister film  
**Executive Producers**  
Christopher Nolan  
Emma Thomas  
Dan Mintz

#### Cillian Murphy

Agent Buchanan  
**Morgan Freeman**  
Joseph Tagger

**Dolby Digital/**  
**Datasat/SDDS/**  
**Dolby Atmos**  
**In Colour**  
**Prints by**  
Technicolor  
**[2.35:1]**

**Distributor**  
Entertainment Film  
Distributors Ltd

10,719ft +0 frames

#### CAST

**Johnny Depp**  
Dr Will Caster  
**Rebecca Hall**  
Evelyn Caster  
**Paul Bettany**  
Max Waters  
**Kate Mara**  
Bree

US, the present. Reclusive AI pioneer Dr Will Caster is shot by an anti-technology terrorist during a conference lecture; the plutonium-soaked bullet gives him fatal radiation poisoning. In her grief, Caster's wife Evelyn decides, with their friend Max, to try uploading Caster's brain on to a mainframe, a gambit that succeeds. Caster dies but his mind lives on, instantly invading the internet in order to make money, set up a secret laboratory in the desert and start solving mankind's problems. The assassin's terrorist group continues to pursue Caster and kidnaps Max, in time converting him to their cause. Eventually, the disembodied Caster can heal living flesh, reconstitute inert materials, enter the consciousness of his patients, create weather and even clone himself, all of which encourages even sympathetic scientists (and the FBI) to side with the terrorists and attack Caster's solar-powered compound. Scared by what has happened to Caster, Evelyn agrees to help, injecting a computer virus into Caster's system; this eliminates him but also shuts down the internet and the global infrastructure it supports.

*'Transcendence' traffics in large, troublesome ideas, even if it is too timid to do them justice*



Virtually normal: computer Johnny Depp looms over Morgan Freeman, Cillian Murphy and Rebecca Hall



## Advanced Style

USA 2013  
Director: Lina Plioplyte

### Reviewed by Perle Petit

*Advanced Style* is a documentary that rethinks ideas about fashion and ageing. When photographer Ari Seth Cohen moved to New York on the advice of his grandmother, he noticed a glamorous older set walking around the city and began to photograph these over-sixties for a blog, intending to show that personal style has nothing to do with age. Director Lina Plioplyte has turned Cohen's photographs into snapshots of the lives of seven of these unique women. Aged between 62 and 95, they demonstrate how their love of life affects the way they dress and feel.

The film charts the development of Cohen's endeavour to draw attention to this largely ignored percentage of society. Split into individual interviews, it focuses on the inspiration that has shaped each woman's personal style. Plioplyte, who has several short fashion documentaries under her belt, takes on the role of silent observer, for the women need no encouragement to voice their opinions.

What began as an impromptu street project has since turned into a world-recognised campaign, whose central concern is that older women are being sidelined by the fashion industry. Through Cohen's 'Advanced Style' blog, women are being given opportunities previously unavailable to them – most remarkably, two of them were chosen for Lanvin's 2012 autumn/winter advertising campaign. As ex-dancer Jacquie jokes, she fantasised about going to Paris when she was 18 but it was only aged 81 that she managed to realise that dream. Regardless of their age, the women still feel they have life and experiences ahead of them, and welcome chances such as these with open arms.

Out of all the exuberant personalities, 93-year-old Ilona stands out. The most eclectically dressed, she is recognisable by the false eyelashes she creates out of her own strikingly red hair, and it's she who most clearly demonstrates the vitality and style that Cohen seems to be searching for. Her lined face and frail steps are counterbalanced by her new lease of life: having found fresh confidence in her own artistic creativity, she clambers on to the stage of a nightclub to sing a husky rendition of 'La vie en rose'. As the self-consciousness of youth has left her, she is finally living life to the full, though she can't help but acknowledge her increasing fragility; as she tells us, she can no longer make definite plans for even the near future.

Though there seems to be a general consensus among the film's subjects that they are artists whose outfits are statements, anxiety about femininity and gender are still in play. Seventy-nine-year-old Lynn, boutique owner and self-titled 'Countess of Glamour', insists that it is



Oh! what a lovely wardrobe: Ilona Royce Smithkin

"inexcusable for a woman not to have her nails polished" – a rather dated notion of stereotypical female beautification. Likewise 67-year-old Debra tells us that at a certain point in her relationships she began to look at herself through male eyes, wondering how much her dress sense would be appreciated by the opposite sex. This rather ruins the point they collectively appear to make about dressing for one's own sense of wellbeing.

At one point, 95-year-old Zelda is asked, "Are you still dancing?" and she responds, "Very rarely, because my partners are all dead." It's moments like this that compensate for the occasional superficiality, which can often come with the territory of fashion. It is not intended to be a poignant moment – it is accompanied by scenes from a party in her honour – yet it explains the tension between the women's hopes and what they can really expect for themselves at this age.

In essence, this is a bittersweet look at life after 60. Its focus is predominantly on self-styling but it also touches on topics such as memory loss, illness and relationships. These unconventional women are to be admired for their continuing vitality and thirst for life. Their aim through this film is not only to show us their eccentric styles but also to inspire their own generation to embrace their creative potential. As 80-year-old, Chanel-loving Joyce tells us: "It's up to you. Don't think about ageing, just go ahead, look good and enjoy the moment!"

## The Amazing Spider-Man 2

USA 2014  
Director: Marc Webb  
Certificate 12A 142m 25s

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

#### Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

The rights to Marvel Comics' stable of heroes and villains (and supporting casts) are spread confusingly across a number of Hollywood studios because the company only recently achieved the vertical integration that rival DC Comics has had at Warner Brothers. Now, Marvel is actively pursuing its own film projects under the shingle of Walt Disney, a corporate entity so vast that it makes OsCorp – whose unethical research projects and lax laboratory safety protocols are responsible for a multiplicity of mutations, benign and monstrous, starting with Spider-Man and extending to most of his rogues' gallery – seem like a start-up. This business circumstance means that 20th Century Fox, which has an active *X-Men* franchise and is working on rebooting the *Fantastic Four*, and Sony, now on its second go-round with Spidey, need to keep making films in order to prevent the rights reverting to the hungry, cross-platforming multiverse up and running over at Marvel Disney.

Under these circumstances, it's a miracle the current *Spider-Man* film series doesn't consist of direct-to-DVD quickies with Bucharest playing New York and Danny Trejo as Kraven the Hunter. With *The Amazing Spider-Man* (2012), Marc Webb had to do over an origin story still reasonably fresh in the mind from Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* (2002) while also coming up with an approach significantly different from Raimi's yet still drawn from the same comics material (mostly, the original Steve Ditko-Stan Lee run on the title). Besides fresh faces in familiar roles, the major innovation in Webb's *The Amazing Spider-Man* was to give Peter Parker (Andrew Garfield) a different love interest. Blonde Gwen Stacy (killed in a 1973 issue) had been replaced in Raimi's film by red-headed Mary Jane Watson (Kirsten Dunst), though she often seemed closer to Gwen than the vampier comics character; and *Spider-Man 3* (2007), whose underperformance cleared the way for the reboot, had already brought in Bryce Dallas Howard as Gwen.

What worked in *The Amazing Spider-Man*, and plays even better here, is that Garfield, a dead ringer for Anthony Perkins in his pre-*Psycho* all-American rangy neurotic roles, and Emma Stone, supernaturally appealing in a chic succession of outfits worthy of Marvel's least-remembered superstar Millie the Model, are a *great* screen couple. In the middle of this kinetic epic, which is awash with new and startling villains and spectacular 3D action, they make Peter and Gwen feel real, sweet, fragile and tragic. To show how much things have changed even since 2002, this stresses what Gwen, a fraction smarter than Peter and unerringly empathetic, brings to the team. She isn't just a prize to be rescued: she turned off the Lizard's mutagen last time round and turns on a drained power plant here, and she won't be webbed up safely out of the way.

The 'death of Gwen Stacy' comics storyline was controversial, though it maintained Marvel's reputation for innovative, uncompromising plotting. Undeniably, the strikingly told arc allowed writer Gerry Conway and artist Gil Kane to make their mark on a series that had been defined by Lee, Ditko and John Romita.

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Ari Seth Cohen  
**Cinematography**  
Lina Plioplyte  
**Editors**  
Yianna Dellatolla  
Michael Carter  
**Original Music**  
**Composed by**  
Kelli Scarr

**Sound Mixing**  
Thomas Joyce  
  
**@Teenage Peanut Productions**  
**Production Company**  
A film by Lina Plioplyte and Ari Seth Cohen

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]  
  
**Distributor**  
Dogwoof

**A documentary about Ari Seth Cohen's campaign to involve older women in the fashion industry. He combs the streets of New York photographing the city's most stylish over-sixties for his 'Advanced Style' blog. Director Lina Plioplyte films seven of these women in a series of interviews and scenes from their day-to-day lives. Aged between 62 and 95, they demonstrate that age does not affect creativity or style.**



## American Interior

United Kingdom 2014  
Director: Dylan Goch

### Reviewed by Sam Davies

Map the wilderness of the Missouri basin in Nebraska, find the Northwest Passage, repel any interloping British Canadian soldiers and – if possible – capture a unicorn. A simple enough mission, although John Evans, the itinerant Welshman given this short to-do list by the Spanish in the 1790s, also had a mission of his own: find a rumoured tribe of Welsh-speaking Native Americans and establish relations with them on behalf of the Welsh nation.

Evans's story is so bizarre and so eventful – spells in the stocks and in prison, malaria and an early, disillusioned death in New Orleans also feature – that it seems incredible it's not better known. *American Interior* sets out to retell it, and to do so by retracing Evans's route. Gruff Rhys, the lead singer of Welsh group Super Furry Animals and a distant descendant of Evans, follows in his footsteps, travelling up the Mississippi and Missouri rivers while playing a series of gigs and meeting local historians. As one of Rhys's couplets has it: "It's a PowerPoint presentation/Right across the nation."

Rhys writes the music and presents Evans's story (with expert mumblecore comic timing) to an easy, unflappable rhythm. As a film, it ambles after its hero Evans as if at walking pace, pausing for musical interludes and the occasional ice-fishing trip. But *American Interior* is – given the anarchic tendencies in Rhys's music with Super Furry Animals – surprisingly happy to conform to current documentary practice, in which everything must be seen as a 'journey' for the presenter. A little more chaos or digression would be welcome at times. And the cinematography is in



King of the swingers: Emma Stone, Andrew Garfield

But it set a precedent for callously mistreating female supporting characters solely to torment or motivate male leads in a manner that has since been overused and subjected to intense criticism (see the 'Women in Refrigerators' website for a critical list of the trope). Webb handles this material with some sensitivity, and the climactic moment (a rare instance of the laws of physics obtruding in a comic-book universe, as Spider-Man catches a falling Gwen but inertia snaps her back anyway) is far more affecting than the equivalent writing-out of feminine influence in *The Dark Knight* (2008) or the bungled dramatisation of another iconic Marvel martyred-woman arc in *X-Men: The Last Stand* (2006). Whether the effect is worth the loss of a

female role model as strong as Gwen was debated in 1973 (Lee had second thoughts and insisted she be cloned) and will be an even hotter topic now.

Unlike some superheroes, Spider-Man is about light as well as dark – the snappy, nervous patter, the showing-off for the crowds and the slapstick contortions are as much a part of the hero's style as his moral code and 3D web-swinging. Webb cannily follows the affecting *Liebostod* not with an extended mope but with the ticking of plot wheels for a third film, as more villains emerge from the Oscorp special projects lab. A stirring, concise coda, involving a specky kid bravely trying to replace Spider-Man in the path of the rampaging Rhino (Paul Giamatti), gets the hero back where we want him, in action. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Avi Arad  
Matt Tolmach

#### Screenplay

Alex Kurtzman  
Roberto Orci

#### Screen Story

Alex Kurtzman  
Roberto Orci  
Jeff Pinkner  
James Vanderbilt  
Based on the Marvel comic book by Stan Lee, Steve Ditko

#### Director of

#### Photography

Dan Mindel

#### Editor

Pietro Scalia

#### Production Designer

Mark Friedberg

#### Music

Hans Zimmer

The Magnificent

Six featuring

Pharrell Williams

and Johnny Marr

#### Supervising

Sound Editor

Eric A. Norris

#### Costume Designer

Deborah L. Scott

#### Visual Effects

Sony Pictures

Imageworks

#### Stunt Co-ordinator

Andy Armstrong

©Columbia Pictures

Industries, Inc.

#### Production

Companies

Columbia Pictures

presents a Marvel

Entertainment/Avi

Arad/Matt Tolmach

production

#### Executive Producers

E. Bennett Walsh

Stan Lee

Alex Kurtzman

Roberto Orci

#### CAST

##### Andrew Garfield

Peter Parker,

'Spider-Man'

##### Emma Stone

Gwen Stacy

##### Jamie Foxx

Max Dillon, 'Electro'

##### Dane DeHaan

Harry Osborn,

'Green Goblin'

##### Campbell Scott

Richard Parker

##### Embeth Davidtz

Mary Parker

##### Colm Feore

Donald Menken

##### Paul Giamatti

Aleksei Sytsevich,

'The Rhino'

##### Sally Field

Aunt May

##### Dolby Digital/Dolby

Atmos/Auro 11.1

#### In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Some screenings

presented in 3D

#### Distributor

Sony Pictures

Releasing

12,817 ft +8 frames

Peter Parker tries to keep a distance from his girlfriend Gwen Stacy because he promised her dying father he would not let his life as Spider-Man put her in harm's way. Max Dillon, a Spider-Man fan who works at tech company Oscorp, is transformed into a dangerous electric lifeform by an industrial accident, and is aggrieved when Spider-Man turns him over to the authorities. Harry Osborn, Peter's childhood friend, inherits Oscorp, but also begins to suffer from the hereditary ailment that killed his father Norman. Meanwhile Peter discovers that his father Richard, a researcher framed for treason by Norman Osborn, used his own DNA in the experiment that created the spider from which Peter gained his powers, so that only

members of his immediate family could fully benefit from the process. Deducing that Spider-Man was empowered by the now-destroyed spider experiment, Harry tries to get the hero to donate his blood for a cure but Peter demurs, wary of side effects. The vengeful Harry liberates Dillon, who now calls himself Electro, and accesses a vial of spider venom, which mutates him but also drives him mad. Electro blacks out the city but Peter, with Gwen's help, restores power and dissipates the threat. However, Harry murders Gwen. Spider-Man retires, heartbroken. From prison, Harry begins outfitting thugs with Oscorp technology. When Aleksei Sytsevich, a crook Spider-Man once caught, rampages in a robotic rhino suit, Spider-Man returns to action.



When the Wales came: Gruff Rhys



sober, if not quite sombre, black-and-white – with occasional pops of pastel to pick out, say, a bobbing umbrella in purple. But then perhaps you can dispense with actual colour when you have the extraordinary, quixotic details of Evans's story to relate.

Evans – in the form of a three-foot-tall felt puppet – accompanies Rhys as a kind of mascot or sidekick. This doesn't always work. Quiet whimsy is all well and good but on several occasions – when the film cuts to puppet-Evans's fixed felt gaze, or when Rhys carries his forebear tucked under one arm – it's impossible not to think that the historical Evans didn't have much to be whimsical about: there's an awkward disconnect in tone. But there is a moment late on in *American Interior* that retroactively casts the puppet in a different light. Rhys is in conversation with Edwin Benson, the last living speaker of the Native American language Mandan: they discuss the death of languages and the precarious future of Welsh. Rhys explains that English is his second language, one he learnt from television and especially *Sesame Street*. The puppet, occasional swerves into bathos aside, clearly taps into deep, formative memories for him.

Shortly after this, Rhys and his fuzzy Evans are in New Orleans on a fruitless hunt for the historical Evans's final resting place, and a tour guide explains to him (in the same cemetery used for the LSD sequence in *Easy Rider*) that he is using the puppet like a true voodoo doll: not as the pin-cushion of popular caricature but as something cared for and treated as a family member. Just as *American Interior* seems to be on the point of fizzling out, having tracked Evans to the city where he died, his project a failure, it manages to conclude with a neat piece of fuzzy logic.

With the credits rolling, Rhys moves from a cemetery in New Orleans to a bonfire on a Welsh hillside, where Evans is given a New Orleans-style funeral dance march – just 200 years late. 📍

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Catryn Ramasut  
Adam Partridge  
Llion Iwan

**Written & Performed by**  
Gruff Rhys

**Director of Photography**  
Ryan Owen  
Eddleston

**Edited by**  
Dylan Goch

**Sound Recordist**  
Dom Corbisiero

©ie ie productions  
Ltd  
**Production**

**Companies**  
ie ie productions for  
S4C in association  
with Film Agency  
for Wales present a  
film by Dylan Goch  
and Gruff Rhys

Supported by  
National Lottery  
through the Arts  
Council for Wales  
Developed through  
EAVE Programme,  
a training initiative  
of the MEDIA  
Programme of the  
European Union

**In Colour and**

**Black & White**  
[1.78:1]

**Distributor**  
Soda Pictures

A documentary in which Gruff Rhys, lead singer of Welsh group Super Furry Animals, retraces the steps of a distant forebear, John Evans. Evans left Wales in the 1790s and crossed the Atlantic in search of a Native American tribe rumoured to speak Welsh, the legacy of a possible encounter with a 12th-century Welsh prince, Madog. Rhys follows Evans's route from the East Coast along the Mississippi and Missouri and down to New Orleans, meeting local historians, recounting Evans's story and performing new songs along the way.

## Bad Neighbours

USA/Japan 2014

Director: Nicholas Stoller

Certificate 15 96m 43s

### Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

More clearly than any other film from the extended Judd Apatow family, *Bad Neighbours* registers the prolonged adolescence of its characters, and by extension its imagined audience, as a crisis of narrative and point-of-view. Early in the film Mac Radner (Seth Rogen) tells a colleague, with whom he is smoking weed at work, that although the prospect of becoming a father had once terrified him, in fact nothing had changed; insofar as her feelings are made known, Kelly Radner (Rose Byrne) seems to feel the same about motherhood.

The arrival of a rowdy college fraternity next door to their suburban home is nominally the catalyst for them to grow up; but not only is their belated development given cursory treatment, it is belied by the film itself, which takes far more pleasure and interest in the Radners' attempts to keep up with the frat brothers, whose parties they attend on various pretexts, than in their ultimate adoption of their prescribed social roles. The party scenes are long and sometimes gratuitous, raising the question whether the film is meant for the Radners in the audience or for the frat boys; yet in narrative terms they pass without consequence. It is never clear what Mac does in order to keep up payments on a large detached house, but the drug-fuelled nights do not impede him, while Kelly seldom looks like she's missed a minute's sleep; nor is even baby Stella affected.

So reluctant is the film to pursue its preordained course that it effectively restarts two-thirds of the way through, when the Radners, having brought to an end the fraternity's excessive partying, recommence hostilities, and therefore the partying, out of sheer boredom at the prospect of married life, conceived as a three-way split of reluctant child-rearing, work (for Mac – Kelly's ambitions remain a mystery), and box-sets. No alternative is ever sought or



Shove thy neighbour: Seth Rogen, Rose Byrne

found. When the Radners separate – for all of 30 seconds of screen-time – it is because of their mutual desire to be “the irresponsible one” in the relationship. This at least allows Kelly to air a critique of the Apatow worldview, in which women serve only to enable men's maturation; but this dramatically significant scene is barely longer than the break-up that follows, and the question is never genuinely resolved.

All this would matter less if the film provoked more laughter, but for the most part swearing, pop-culture references and drugs, the latter held to be intrinsically funny, have been substituted for jokes. Probably part-improvised – the credited writers, making their debut, are longstanding Apatow assistants – too many scenes involve Rogen and Byrne floundering in pursuit of a punchline. One of the better jokes – there are some – involves the frat boys dressing up as different Robert De Niro characters, with Teddy (Zac Efron) going as Travis Bickle. Lurking in the margins of *Bad Neighbours* is a ‘yuppies in peril’ movie, and not only would *Cape Fear*'s Max Cady have been closer to the mark, but Efron looks psychotic enough to play him. 📍

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Seth Rogen  
Evan Goldberg

**Written by**

Andrew Jay Cohen  
Brendan O'Brien

#### Director of Photography

Brandon Trost

#### Editor

Zene Baker

#### Production Designer

Julie Berghoff

#### Music by/Score

Produced by

Michael Andrews

#### Production Sound Mixer

Steve Nelson

#### Costume Designer

Leesa Evans

©Universal Studios

#### Production Companies

Universal Pictures

presents a Point

Grey/Good Universe

production

A Nicholas Stoller film

Presented in

association with

Dentsu Inc./

Fuji Television

#### Network, Inc.

#### Executive Producers

Nathan Kahane

Joe Drake

Brian Bell

Andrew Jay Cohen

Brendan O'Brien

#### Cast

Seth Rogen

Mac Radner

Zac Efron

Teddy Sanders

Rose Byrne

Kelly Radner

Christopher

Mintz-Plassé

Scoonie

Dave Franco

Pete

Elise Vargas

Zoey Vargas

Stella

Brian Huskey

Bill Wazowski

Ike Barinholtz

Jimmy

Carla Gallo

Paula

Halston Sage

Brooke

Lisa Kudrow

Carol Gladstone, dean

#### Dolby Digital/

Datasat

**Colour by**

DeLuxe

[1.85:1]

#### Distributor

Universal Pictures

International

UK & Eire

8,704 ft +8 frames

US theatrical title

Neighbors

Young suburban parents Mac and Kelly Radner have their lives disrupted when a college fraternity, led by Teddy and Pete, establishes itself in the house next door. While fearful that the frat brothers will disturb their and their baby's sleep, the Radners are at the same time keen not to appear as old and uncool, and as a result send out mixed messages, partying with the students one night and calling the police – having promised not to – the next.

After this breach of trust the frat brothers, having befriended the rest of the neighbourhood, begin to terrorise the Radners, who are ignored both by the police and by the college dean. The Radners retaliate by flooding the frat house's basement; the frat pays for repairs by making and selling dildos. The Radners eventually win a partial victory by arranging a hook-up between Teddy's girlfriend and Pete and encouraging a party so wild that the college is forced to take action.

The Radners, who have surreptitiously enjoyed the fight, decide to go further and try to end the frat's existence altogether by paying an informant to expose its nasty hazing rituals. When this plan goes awry the frat again retaliates, increasing the tension between career-minded Pete and bozo Teddy, and leading to the brief break-up of the Radners' marriage. Finally the Radners prevail by again engineering a huge party to which the police and college have to respond. Four months later Mac and Kelly, now studying at night school, are reconciled.



## Before the Winter Chill

France/Luxembourg 2013  
Director: Philippe Claudel  
Certificate 15 102m 34s

**Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau**

**Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist**

Philippe Claudel's *Before the Winter Chill*, like his earlier, successful *I've Loved You So Long* (2008), also with Kristin Scott Thomas, blends bourgeois drama with psychological thriller. In this new film, however, the drama is more cliché (married older man's life turned upside down by beautiful young woman) and the thriller element both more intrusive and less believable. The result is disappointing, despite impeccable performances by the four leads.

The premise of the story is the melancholy that seizes the hero on the threshold of old age, as signalled by the title. Yet it is hard to feel sorry for wealthy, successful Paul (Daniel Auteuil in familiar quietly anxious mode), however miserable he may feel: he is a brilliant brain surgeon, adored by patients and colleagues and blessed with the perfect wife, Lucie. As played by Scott Thomas, Lucie is naturally beautiful, elegant, intelligent and understanding. While her husband is away saving lives, she seems content with gardening and occasionally looking after her grandchild in their beautiful (if cold) modernist home set in a vast park. Their best friend Gérard (the lovely Richard Berry, rather wasted in the part), despite having been in love with Lucie all his life, seems happy with his supporting role in their lives.

Of course we can see immediately that all is not well in this earthly paradise, and here lies the problem. For a film that aims to inhabit the territory of French intimate psychological drama, based in nuance and understatement, *Before the Winter Chill* is rather clunky. Paul and Lucie's house, all straight lines, minimalist decor and huge glass partitions, is too obviously a metaphor for the couple's mental 'prison'. If we've missed it, Lucie's sister Mathilde (Laure Killing) makes the point explicitly. Paul and Lucie's stilted, silent dinners, Paul's political arguments with their son Victor (Jérôme Varanfrain), the hints of unhappiness in their daughter-in-law Caroline

(Vicky Krieps), Mathilde's mental illness – all this builds a picture of a 'poor little rich family'.

Enter the catalyst, Lou (Leïla Bekhti), the sexy woman from the wrong side of the tracks. A young waitress who claims Paul operated on her in the past, she suddenly keeps cropping up in his life, to the point of harassment. Predictably, he is at first indifferent, then annoyed, then obsessed, until finally he has a breakdown. The film makes an interesting choice by casting Bekhti, one of the rising stars of Maghrebi origins in French cinema (seen in *A Prophet* in 2009 and *All That Glitters* in 2010). But the opportunity to explore ethnic and class difference is not taken up. One reason is the clumsy thriller plot, including its lurid denouement. The 'mystery' of Lou's identity and, concurrently, the threatening appearance of bouquets of red roses, are implausibly drawn out.

More fundamentally, the facets of Lou's identity – working-class girl, glamorous femme fatale, prostitute – are entirely constructed from Paul's point of view, as when he spots her at the opera or cruises the red-light district; we never have access to her side of the story. In the end, it boils down to a classic male fantasy of rejuvenation through swapping older wife for younger model, even if the relationship remains platonic and the family is, however ironically, reunited in the end.

*Before the Winter Chill* comes at a time when Scott Thomas has made public her desire to give up both filmmaking and France – the former as a bore and the latter because it is in terminal decline and in the grip of anti-Semitism. Though the end of her love affair with France may have at least as much to do with her separation from her French husband as with politics (she admits she never bothered to vote), her impatience with repeated typecasting in the role of a dignified but desperate bourgeois woman is understandable. *Before the Winter Chill* gives her little more to do than look elegantly fraught or muck around in wellies. Films need to give her (and other actresses) substantial and interesting parts – sadly still far from the norm. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Yves Marmion  
Romain Rojtman  
**Written by**  
Philippe Claudel  
**Director of Photography**  
Denies Lenoir  
**Editor**  
Elisa Aboulker  
**Production Designer**  
Samuel Deshors  
**Original Music**  
André Dizeux  
**Sound**  
Pierre Lenoir  
François Dumont  
**Costume Designer**  
Magdalena Labuz

©Les Films du 24, TF1  
Droits Audiovisuels,  
Samsa Film,  
France 3 Cinéma  
**Production Companies**  
UGC present a  
Les Films du 24  
production  
in co-production

with Samsa Film,  
France 3 Cinema, TF1  
Droits Audiovisuels  
with the participation  
of Canal+, Ciné+,  
France Télévisions  
in association with  
A Plus Image 4,  
Hoche Images  
with the support  
of Fonds national  
de soutien de  
la production  
audiovisuelle du  
Grand-Duché de  
Luxembourg

### CAST

**Daniel Auteuil**  
Paul  
**Kristin Scott Thomas**  
Lucie  
**Leïla Bekhti**  
Lou  
**Richard Berry**  
Gérard  
**Vicky Krieps**  
Caroline

**Laure Killing**  
Mathilde  
**Jérôme Varanfrain**  
Victor

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Metrodrome  
Distribution Ltd

**9,231ft +0 frames**

French theatrical title  
**Avant l'hiver**

**France, the present. Paul, a brain surgeon, is happily married to Lucie. They live in a beautiful house and are surrounded by friends and family; these include Paul's best friend and colleague Gérard, son Victor and daughter-in-law Caroline and their baby. Although Gérard has long carried a torch for Lucie, he is resigned to her being married to Paul. This peaceful set-up is disturbed by the arrival of a beautiful young woman, Lou, in Paul's life, and by the mysterious delivery of anonymous bouquets of red roses at his home and work. Lucie increasingly finds her life empty, despite enjoying gardening and spending time with her granddaughter; she is also concerned by her mentally ill sister and the frequent arguments between Paul and Victor. Intrigued and attracted by Lou, Paul discovers that she works as a prostitute, though their relationship remains platonic. Paul has a breakdown, forcing him to take time off work. His relationship with Lucie deteriorates and he leaves home. He traces Lou to a seedy hotel. Later she is found dead, having committed suicide by slashing her wrists. The police reveal that Paul had a narrow escape, as Lou and one of her friends ensnared wealthy older men and tortured them for their money. The film concludes with Paul fully restored, back at work, and surrounded by his happy and reunited family.**

## Believe

United Kingdom/USA 2012  
Director: David Scheinmann

**Reviewed by Michael Pattison**

The only funny gag in *Believe* is its most topical. The year is 1984 and Sir Matt Busby (Brian Cox), retired former manager of Manchester United and survivor of the 1958 Munich air disaster, is now coaching a team of primary-school kids on their way to a seven-a-side trophy. As the youngest team member leaves the pitch to make way for its star player, Busby compliments him: "I'll put a word in for you with United." The boy replies: "No way! I'm gonna play for City!"

The line sounds like a deliberately anachronistic nod to ongoing shifts in the real world. Indeed, the film's theatrical release coincides with a growing disillusionment among many Manchester United fans, whose team at present are enduring the difficulties that can follow a managerial change after long-term stability, while local rivals Manchester City pursue glory further up the league table.

Unfortunately, nostalgia for an apparently irredeemable golden age also pervades the film itself – and does so to such a degree that it appears more like an opportunistic rallying cry rather than the stuff of true entertainment. Based on actual events, David Scheinmann's second feature, following his underrated indie comedy *The West Wittering Affair* (2006), pits Busby against his own traumas, which have haunted him since that tragic airplane crash killed eight of his players, three staff members and 12 other passengers. "Why was I spared?" Busby asks his pal Bob (Philip Jackson). Apparently, it's because he "left a job unfinished". And so, on discovering that the blond-haired, blue-eyed tyke who one day nicks his wallet is also an impossibly gifted footballer, Busby naturally wastes no time in appointing himself coach of the young lad's cobbled-together soccer team.

Said tyke is Georgie Gallagher (Jack Smith), the working-class son of single mum Erica (Natascha McElhone), whose dad died in a car crash and whose chance to attend grammar school hinges on an entrance exam. Trouble is, Georgie's preparation for this exam is overseen by caricature teacher Dr Farquar (Toby Stephens), a bandleader for whom "brass is class" and "football is for those too weak to play rugby". In pursuit of his



Kicking and dreaming: Jack Smith



own closure, Busby hovers like some persistent beacon of avuncular faith opposite Stephens's painfully punitive party-pooper. An upbeat conclusion is never in doubt.

But while crowd-pleasing schmaltz has its place, is there any excuse for it being so direly scripted? Scheinmann and fellow writers Carmelo Pennisi and Massimiliano Durante have penned a double-helix triumph-over-adversity story under the illusion that you can achieve a dramatic payoff after cutting every corner imaginable on the way. Obligatory class tensions are perfunctorily laced in, riffs on absent fathers turn thin quickly, and the Jedi-like advice Busby imparts to his young protégé about game-winning free kicks is simply bad coaching. Add to this some dreadful casting and the built-in problem of simulated sports being decidedly uncinematic, and *Believe* is as convincing as the idea of David Moyes's current Manchester United side winning silverware. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producers

Manuela Noble  
Justin Peyton  
Ben Timlett

#### Story

Carmelo Pennisi  
Massimiliano Durante

#### Written by

Carmelo Pennisi  
Massimiliano Durante

David Scheinmann

#### Director of Photography

Gary Shaw

#### Editor

Julian Rodd

#### Production Designer

Catrin Meredydd

#### Composer

Christian Henson

#### Sound Mixer

Peter Gaudino

#### Costume Designer

Joanna Eatwell

©Theatre of Dreams  
Entertainment Ltd

#### Production Companies

Trinity Film present a  
Bill & Ben production  
in association  
with Wachafilm

#### Executive Producers

Mark Sandell  
Aurelio Landolt  
Hanspeter Jaberg

### CAST

#### Brian Cox

Sir Matt Busby  
Natascha McElhone  
Erica Gallagher

#### Anne Reid

Jean Busby  
Philip Jackson  
Bob

#### Kate Ashfield

Helen

#### Toby Stephens

Dr Farquar

#### Jack Smith

Georgie Gallagher

#### Dolby Digital

#### In Colour

#### Distributor

Trinity Filmed  
Entertainment

Manchester, 1984. Young working-class football addict Georgie Gallagher attends an open day at a boys' grammar school with his mother Erica. Intrigued by an advertisement for a seven-a-side tournament, Georgie puts together a team. In search of the tournament entry fee, Georgie steals the wallet of retired ex-Manchester United manager Sir Matt Busby. Busby, eager to return to coaching, keeps his identity from the team and appoints himself their coach. Georgie divides his time between training for the tournament and preparing for the grammar school's entrance exam under the tutelage of bandleader Dr Farquar. After he is arrested for trying to steal money from Dr Farquar, Georgie tells Busby that his dad died in a car crash. Busby tells Erica that his own father died in WWI.

The team progresses in the tournament, though Georgie realises that Erica has concealed the fact that the final coincides with his exam. Soon afterwards, he discovers Busby's real identity. Hurt by such dishonesty, Georgie opts to take the exam. At half-time, however, Dr Farquar leads his brass band on to the pitch, delaying the game's resumption and allowing Erica time to fetch Georgie from the exam. Georgie arrives in time to score a goal and sets up another to help his team draw level. With the last kick of the game, Georgie scores. The team celebrates.

## Benny & Jolene

United Kingdom 2014

Director: Jamie Adams

Certificate 15 87m 36s



Tin pan valley: Craig Roberts, Charlotte Ritchie

### Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

The title of director Jamie Adams's debut feature calls to mind the 1993 romantic comedy *Benny & Joon*, starring Johnny Depp and Mary Stewart Masterson as unconventional teenage lovers. But in the context of the newer film's renaming – from *Jolene: The Indie Folk Star Movie* to *Benny & Jolene* for its LOCO festival world premiere this year – the association is a false lead. The retitling more revealing than the rubric, it looks like a late effort to fall on the side of one or other genre – as if titling stimulated content as effectively as call and response. In fact, the film fulfils the promise of neither title: not quite a parody of the contemporary music scene (in the mould of *This Is Spinal Tap*) nor adequately a relationship comedy.

Shot for the most part on handheld camera in mockumentary style, the film takes up with teenage Benny (Craig Roberts) and Jo (Charlotte Ritchie) of amateurish music duo Jolene, who are caught unawares and camera-shy when their first single becomes a number-one hit. Apparently a new band and, though they met at school, lately unaccustomed to each other's company, they make an awkward outfit, and Ben's crush on Jo – unrequited at first – curdles their public front. A pusillanimous band manager and unskilled publicity team unlade their suspect advice as the duo negotiate appointments with daytime television and record-shop signings before hitting the road to launch an unwritten album at a festival in Wales.

In the confined space of the campervan tour

bus, the film locates its best self. The lo-fi look appreciates with containment and syncs with smoother, sharper adlibbing, which elsewhere has a tendency to rub away at scene objectives. The film's very British brand of awkward humour – of the likes of *Extras* and *The Office* – finds focus in close quarters, mixing with elements of bed-hopping farce that feel original for its young players, shy and self-aware. Intercutting with Jolene's two mums following behind in their car is a nice addition and momentarily suggestive of a more thoroughgoing exploration of relationships. *Benny & Jolene* might have been a younger *The Trip* (2010), with its backdrop of unstarry stardom and a cross-country jaunt at cross purposes.

The remainder of the film has suffered in the assembly. It has a sketch-like feel, and the plot spools loose in sections. And though a talented cast of actors give their best, they occasionally lack direction. Rosamund Hanson (*This Is England*) is expectedly excellent in her part as a leopard-printed PR, but Roberts, a natural performer, is brought under the yoke of Ritchie's improvisation style, which is agitated and won't admit surprise at the conversation of her co-stars. Possibly she was edited without empathy, or the film's five-day shoot left limited options, with only so much footage to choose from. The low budget does appear to have left its bruise on the production, in little blunders here and there: the wheezy laughter of a crew member is preserved in the sound recording as a raging Roberts falls backwards out of a camping chair. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Jon Rennie  
Jamie Adams

#### Written by

Jamie Adams

#### Directors of Photography

Ryan Owen Eddleston  
Luke Jacobs

#### Editor

Sara Jones

#### Production Design

Chloe Savage

#### Sound Recordist

Dom Corbisiero

#### Costume Designer

Rosie Berry

©Jolene Films

Limited

#### Production Company

A Jolene Films  
production

#### Executive Producer

Jon Rennie

#### Cast

Charlotte Ritchie  
Jolene  
Craig Roberts  
Ben  
Rosamund Hanson  
Nadia  
Dolly Wells  
Rosamund  
Keiron Self  
Phil  
Laura Patch  
Lowri  
Ian Smith  
Adrian  
Tom Rosenthal  
Tommy  
Gary Knowles  
Drive  
Nico Tatarowicz

Nigel  
Louise Thompson  
Tania

#### In Colour

[1.78:1]

#### Distributor

Verve Pictures

London, the present. Jo and Benny of amateurish teenage music duo Jolene are interviewed on breakfast television after a surprise number-one hit. Jo struggles with songwriting for an album, and instigates sex with Ben for inspiration. The resulting unsuccessful encounter leads to a track about male performance anxiety, which upsets Ben as he has feelings for Jo. Encumbered by a fainthearted band manager and an unskilled publicity team, the pair must navigate a press conference, record-shop signing and the making of a music video. Benny, Jo and the team travel by campervan to Wales after securing a slot at a music festival, where they are due to launch the new album. The chemistry between Ben and Jo comes to a head at the campsite, and each flirts with a member of the entourage to make the other jealous. The following day, they discover their festival slot has been cancelled, and their album artwork looks a sham. Ben storms off. When a last-minute slot becomes free, Jo refuses to perform without him. The two communicate their romantic feelings for each other with cue cards.



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## Beyond the Edge

New Zealand 2013  
Director: Leanne Pooley  
Certificate PG 90m 20s

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

Made to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the conquest of Everest, this docudrama mixes high-quality colour cine footage and still images shot by the original 1953 expedition with 3D recreations of the difficult journey, accompanied by clips of interviews with the mountaineers and various experts. Edmund Hillary is played by Chad Moffitt, a remarkable lookalike whose usual screen credits are as an effects animator on Peter Jackson projects, and the rest of the cast have similarly been chosen to match the faces in the strictly documentary footage. Six decades on, even after numberless subsequent ascents of the conquered peak, it's a fascinating story, though Leanne Pooley's telling of it isn't always satisfying.

After a brief history of earlier attempts to reach the summit, mostly consisting of a sombre listing of those who lost their lives in the process, the film establishes that in 1953 there was a queue forming and it seemed certain that someone would soon be successful where others had failed. A Swiss expedition had just come very close to managing the feat and an American team was readying to go – one commentator speculates that this attempt, led by Colonel John Hunt, was Great Britain's last chance for imperial achievement, although of course the lasting fame would go to a New Zealander and a Nepalese. In recounting the well-known tale, Pooley does stress often overlooked elements: the fact that the *lower* approaches to the mountain – a crevice-pitted, constantly shifting crushed ice glacier – are among the most dangerous stretches of the whole enterprise, and that Tom Bourdillon and Charles Evans, the members of Hunt's team who tried the ascent first, briefly held the record of going higher than any human being had ever gone before.

The trouble with *Beyond the Edge* – aside from its generic, hard-to-remember title – is that it isn't content to be a straight archival documentary but won't commit to being a full-on period drama either. Blurry flashback recreations of the woodshed in which young Hillary was strapped by his stern father and the swarm of ants he reckoned were his only friends at school try to suggest how his character was formed, while testimony from the man himself, his colleagues and his son hint at friction between the two rough New Zealanders on Hunt's team and the mostly public-school-educated Brits – Hillary



Snow falling on leaders: Chad Moffitt

and his countryman George Lowe being the only ones honest or impolite enough to put themselves forward for the peak team rather than simply hoping to be picked. But none of this comes through in the archive footage or is dramatised in the recreation. If a conventional biopic were made (especially by New Zealanders), it would be hard to avoid the cliché of toffee-nosed, privileged, patronising Brits shown up by the canny colonials, but this goes out of its way to stress the fairness and team spirit inculcated by Hunt. Personal drama is avoided: even an incident early on when Tenzing saves Hillary's life as he falls into a crevice doesn't illustrate any special bond they might have had. The film doesn't include what Tenzing said happened at the summit: after it had been agreed that the two would make the final ascent together, Hillary at the last moment stepped ahead so that he would be the sole first man on top of Everest.

The scenery is spectacular, of course, even if 3D tends to make it look like a Victorian stereopticon image of the Himalayas rather than impart any you-are-there sense, until a final 360-degree view from the summit. Pull-backs showing how tiny the people are, and how precarious their perches, convey the awe and danger of the enterprise, but this is a celebration of an uncomplicated achievement rather than the analysis of compulsive behaviour in the face of the infinite that you might have got if Werner Herzog had been allowed to lug 3D cameras up the tallest mountain in the world. 🍷

## Cheap Thrills

USA 2012  
Director: E.L. Katz  
Certificate 15 87m 38s

### Reviewed by Samuel Wigley

E.L. Katz's debut feature plays out like the sickest, darkly funniest 'a man walks into a bar' joke you've ever heard. It's a tale of twisting, escalating viciousness with a compulsive fascination, a little like an 80s yuppie-nightmare thriller such as *After Hours* (1985) or a hedonism-turns-nasty shocker like *Very Bad Things* (1998) but one that feels very of the moment, an exploitation film that's noticed our reality-TV-stoked preoccupation with other people's humiliation and gleefully sticks its finger into the wound.

So, a man walks into a bar... Craig (Pat Healy) has lost his job and is wondering how he's going to pay the rent and support his infant son. He's detoured for a liquid pick-me-up on his way home. While drowning his sorrows, he meets Vince (Ethan Embry), once a good friend at school but whom he hasn't seen for years. They used to talk about all the creative things they'd do when they were older, but now Vince has been in prison and makes a thuggish living as a debt enforcer.

From these beginnings, *Cheap Thrills* simmers with a creeping sense of unease. Craig is at once more respectable and less solvent than this gregarious ghost from his past, though the prickliness we expect quickly gives way to bonhomie. But a table away is Colin (David Koechner), a pie-hat-wearing pleasure-seeker out to show his beautiful wife Violet (Sara Paxton) a good time on her birthday. Buying them all a bottle of \$300 tequila and stumping up ever greater cash incentives, he challenges the reunited friends to an increasingly outrageous series of bets and dares.

There's a touch of *Indecent Proposal* (1993) in this set-up of a millionaire needling away at the moral compass of less prosperous mortals, and part of the queasy fun of Katz's film is determining just how far along this road of challenge and reward any 'right-thinking' person (as *Cheap Thrills* all but encourages us to consider ourselves) would go.

Koechner, best known for the *Anchorman* films



Heavy betting: Pat Healy, David Koechner

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Matthew Metcalfe  
**Written by**  
Leanne Pooley  
**Screen Story**  
Matthew Metcalfe  
Leanne Pooley  
**Director of Photography**  
Richard Black  
**Editor**  
Tim Mouchouse

**Production Designer**  
Grant Major  
**Original Music**  
David Long  
**Sound Design**  
Bruno Barrett-Garnier  
**Costume Designer**  
Barbara Darragh  
  
©GFC (Everest) Ltd  
**Production Companies**

General Film Corporation in association with New Zealand Film Commission, NZ On Air Platinum Fund and Digipost presents a Matthew Metcalfe production  
**Film Extracts**  
*The Conquest of Everest* (1953)

### CAST

**Chad Moffitt**  
Edmund Hillary  
**Sonam Sherpa**  
Tenzing Norgay  
**John Wright**  
John Hunt  
**Joshua Rutter**  
George Lowe  
**Dan Musgrove**  
Tom Bourdillon

**Errol Shand**  
Charles Evans  
**Phurenje Sherpa**  
Ang Nyima  
**Jimmy Kunsang**  
Pemba  
**Callum Grant**  
Alfred Gregory  
**Matthew Metcalfe**  
Wilfred Noyce  
  
In Colour

[1.85:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

**Distributor**  
Metrodome Distribution Ltd  
  
**8,130ft +0 frames**

In 1953, Colonel John Hunt leads a British expedition to the border of Tibet and Nepal to climb Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world. All previous attempts have failed. The expedition makes the arduous trek to the base of the mountain, and Hunt has to select a team to make the final ascent.

Englishmen Tom Bourdillon and Charles Evans are selected, but the failure of breathing equipment designed by Bourdillon prevents them from reaching the peak. Hunt's second-choice team consists of New Zealander Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay. On 29 May, Hillary and Tenzing reach the summit.



## Concussion

USA 2013  
Director: Stacie Passon  
Certificate 15 96m 0s

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Stacie Passon, a commercials producer-turned-feature filmmaker, displays a strange mixture of ambition and low-stakes conservatism in her feature debut *Concussion*, which premiered at the 2013 Sundance festival.

The ambition is evident in Passon's choice to work in the shadow of an acknowledged classic, for Luis Buñuel's *Belle de jour* (1967) is *Concussion*'s unavoidable reference point. Like Buñuel's film, Passon's concerns an ennui-struck housewife who finds a vital outlet in living a double-life as a prostitute. One essential difference is that Passon's film is about a woman in a same-sex partnership who begins to seek physical and emotional gratification through sex work for other women – an activity that, against the evidence of all studies, is still assumed to be mostly the preserve of men. You might expect both of these factors to be milked for maximum novelty but Passon doesn't treat them as anything strange or even particularly exceptional, and this is one of her film's greatest merits. She deals with sex in a way that acknowledges its power without displaying any sex-as-a-subversive-act righteous self-satisfaction, and this is in itself worth something.

While Catherine Deneuve discovered a fondness for S/M and elaborate degradation in Buñuel's film, *Concussion*'s Abby (Robin Weigert) finds something else – namely a need to be useful, to adapt herself to the sexual wants of her clientele, since her own wife Kate (Julie Fain Lawrence) has made her own lack of desire abundantly clear. This can sometimes come across as a little too feelgood, as when Abby tutors a heavyset college girl who has never had an orgasm before. And when Passon tries to broach rough stuff, the results are tentative and not entirely convincing.

More than clean zipperless fucks, Abby, who insists on meeting clients for chat and coffee before proceeding to bed, is offering something of a sex surrogate/girlfriend experience. Weigert previously appeared in the 2012 surrogate comedy *The Sessions*, though her best-known role is as Calamity Jane in HBO's *Deadwood*. As Abby gets deeper into the lifestyle, her dilemma might be best described by the title of *another* sex



Julie Fain Lawrence, Robin Weigert

surrogate film, one that appeared at this year's Berlin fest, Anja Marquardt's *She's Lost Control*.

Weigert's performance is what distinguishes *Concussion* from the crop of superficially similar material. Her evasive default expression is a tart smile that feels like a wince, suggesting a burden of self-knowledge like a rock in her shoe. Abby is a woman who's grown wholly accustomed to abjuring physical pleasure, and when it re-enters her life she's able to approach it from a new, mystified perspective – curious but not at all clinical. The sex scenes, stopping short of the really graphic, frequently achieve a rare level of startled intimacy, and Passon puts the widescreen frame to good use for bedroom horizontals – though elsewhere the compositions have a tendency to leave characters stranded.

Passon grounds her story in a highly specific milieu established through a few choice details. Abby, Kate and their circle of friends, seen at parties and liquid lunches and the gym, are identified as early-90s club kids who've left Manhattan and sexual licence for the burbs and chartered, predictable lives. (There are offhand references to the legendary Limelight club and bathroom hook-ups of decades past.) It's the grown-up world of curtailed expectations and scaled-in risk, and if *Concussion* feels somewhat slight, it's because there's no sense that anything *really* bad could happen here. A closing coda suggests that Abby has found a way to have it all – city and suburbs, sex and stability – and though this is winningly optimistic, it doesn't make for crushing screen drama. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Travis Stevens  
Gabriel Cowan  
John Suits  
**Written by**  
Trent Haaga  
David Chirchirillo  
**Cinematography**  
Sebastian Wintero  
Hansen  
Andrew Wheeler  
**Editor**  
Brody Gusar  
**Production Designer**  
Melisa Jusufi  
**Original Music Composed and Performed by**  
Mads Heldtberg  
**Sound Mixer**  
Jesse 'C-Nug' Brown  
**Costume Designer**  
Kelsey Stengle

©Midnight Role, LLC

**Production Companies**  
New Artists Alliance  
presents a Snowfort  
Pictures production  
**Executive Produced by**  
Curtis Raines  
Gena Wilbur  
Jonathan Schurgin

### CAST

**Pat Healy**  
Craig Daniels  
**Sara Paxton**  
Violet  
**Ethan Embry**  
Vince  
**Amanda Fuller**  
Audrey Daniels  
**David Koechner**  
Colin  
**Laura Covelli**  
Caryn the bartender  
**Todd Farmer**

security guard  
**Elissa Dowling**  
twaker  
**Eric Neil Gutierrez**  
Enrique  
**Ruben Pla**  
Doug  
**Claudia Salinas**  
stripper  
**Brighton Sharbino**  
Luann

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Koch Film

**7,887 ft +0 frames**

Los Angeles, the present. After losing his job at a garage and receiving an eviction notice on his apartment, Craig worries that he will not be able to support his wife and child. At a bar, he bumps into an old school friend, Vince, who has spent time in prison.

The pair are drawn into a round of drinks with a wealthy couple, Colin and Violet, who are out celebrating the latter's birthday. Offering ever larger sums of money, Colin tempts the two friends to take part in a series of petty dares, which culminate in Craig punching a nightclub bouncer. Craig is knocked out cold by the bouncer's retaliatory blow. Coming to, he finds himself in Colin's home, where the games and dares continue. Vince talks Craig into robbing the house but the plan backfires and instead the two become embroiled in increasingly violent and outrageous attempts to bid for their host's cash. One bet involves the happily married Craig having sex with Violet; other bets involve Craig and Vince breaking into and defiling the neighbouring house and chopping off one of their own fingers.

The cruel games climax with Craig and Vince competing to kill each other. The victor, Craig, stumbles off into the night with his prize money as Colin and Violet watch, having placed their own bets on which friend would kill the other. A bloodied mess, Craig arrives home to his wife.

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Rose Troche  
**Written by**  
Stacie Passon  
**Director of Photography**  
David Kruta  
**Edited by**  
Anthony Cupo  
**Production Designer**  
Lisa Myers  
**Composer**  
Barb Morrison

**Sound Mixers**  
Josh Allen  
Chuck Brownly  
Olafian Agueh  
**Costume Designer**  
Jennifer K. Bentley

©Concussion Films  
**Production Companies**  
RADIUS-TWC and 93  
Films in association  
with Razorwire

Films and Cliff  
Chenfeld present  
Made possible in  
part with support  
from the Sundance  
Institute Feature Film  
Program and the  
CineReach Project at  
Sundance Institute  
Supported by IFP  
**Executive Producers**  
Cliff Chenfeld  
Anthony Cupo

### CAST

**Robin Weigert**  
Abby, 'Eleanor'  
**Maggie Siff**  
Sam Bennet  
**Johnathan Tchaikovsky**  
Justin  
**Janel Moloney**  
Pru  
**Julie Fain Lawrence**  
Kate Ableman

**Emily Kinney**  
girl  
**Daniel London**  
Evan  
**Ben Shenkman**  
Graham Bennet  
**Maren Shapero**  
Mayer Ableman  
**Micah Shapero**  
Jake Ableman  
**Funda Duval**  
Sarah  
**Claudine Ohayon**

Lisa  
**Jane Peterson**  
Mrs Bulkan

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Picturehouse  
Entertainment

**8,640 ft +0 frames**

New York City and the New Jersey suburbs, present day. Abby and her wife Kate live a settled, sexless life, raising their two pre-adolescent children. After their son concusses Abby with a softball during an outing at the park, however, she begins to behave strangely. She pays two women for sex, then starts to moonlight as an escort for other women. She is refurbishing a dilapidated loft in Manhattan, and uses it as a place to rendezvous with clients. Abby forms

different emotional attachments to her clients, who include an overweight virgin, a brittle middle-aged divorcee and a bored suburban neighbour. After Abby uncharacteristically fails to pick up the children from school one day, Kate begins to suspect that something is amiss. Dropping by Abby's loft unannounced, she confirms her suspicions. The two become estranged but then gradually slip back into their old domestic routine, with hints of a newfound understanding between them.



# The Dirties

Canada 2013  
Director: Matt Johnson  
Certificate 15 82m 43s

## Reviewed Calum Marsh

Matt Johnson, the director and star of *The Dirties*, has the gifts of a natural documentarian and no apparent interest in making a documentary. Instead his talent manifests itself in more peculiar ways. Non-fiction, for him, is nothing more than raw material, pliable stuff that he later sculpts, from the remove of the editing room, into the shape of comedy and drama. The approach is deceptively simple. Johnson begins by devising characters for himself and for a handful of semi-professional actors, whose interactions are loosely scripted and whose dialogue is almost entirely improvised, as in the films of Mike Leigh. So far, so good. But he then introduces an element of chance: he brings his cast and crew to public places and begins shooting, surreptitiously, among ordinary people who have no idea that they are now performing in a film.

These unwitting participants are not merely extras — indeed, quite often they are the subject of a scene. This results in an intriguing friction. When *The Dirties* opens, for instance, with a conversation between Johnson (playing an exaggerated version of himself) and two young children in a park, it's difficult to get a sense of how much of what we're watching is 'real' and how much has been staged. As it happens, the moment was captured spontaneously: the children simply happened to be playing in the park that afternoon, and Johnson, there to film a different scene, simply happened to engage them in an interesting discussion, his cameras fortuitously recording from a distance. How could we have known? *The Dirties* bristles with this sort of ambiguity. The film teems with the messy sprawl of life: here we find reality sought out and deftly wrangled into fiction.

This strategy may seem familiar to fans of comedian Sacha Baron Cohen, who found a lucrative comic niche in the mid-2000s by combining elements of the mockumentary with prankish 'hidden camera' gags (a gimmick repeated, more recently, in *Jackass Presents Bad Grandpa*). Johnson takes a similarly cavalier attitude to bringing real people into the orbit of his fiction but the difference is that, in Johnson's case, the notion of mockery never enters the equation; the object is not so much to fool or deceive these people as to draw them into a story that remains open to outside contributions. As a result *The Dirties* takes on a certain communal quality: like the best documentaries, the final product wouldn't — and in fact couldn't — be the same without their influence.

Johnson honed this technique during the two years he spent working on *Nirvana the Band the Show*, a popular web series he wrote, directed and starred in alongside Jay McCarroll. The show found Johnson and McCarroll playing local musicians desperate to make a name for themselves in Toronto, and central to its appeal was its largely improvisatory use of the city's best-known fixtures; over the course of an average episode the pair might stage a chase along a bustling street, host an impromptu party in a parking lot or be thrust into a dramatic confrontation on a restaurant patio, all filmed from afar without anyone around them —



Class war: Owen Williams, Matt Johnson

including those involved in the proceedings — being aware that any of it was an act.

The idea with *The Dirties* was to apply the same technique to dramatic material. To that end Johnson chose a subject whose seriousness would never be in doubt: he would trace the path of a bullied teenager as he devised and conducted a violent school shooting. It's a provocative issue, of course, but it's a testament to Johnson's perspicacity that he never indulges in sensationalism — he's content instead to take a sober, level-headed perspective, addressing what he understands is a nuanced issue with much-needed sensitivity.

The use of non-fiction proves a considerable

boon in this regard. Johnson had the good luck to find a high school willing to grant him full access: he and his co-star, Owen Williams, were registered as students and effectively smuggled into classes for several weeks, filming their exploits under the pretence of a 'class project' and interacting with real students who were for the most part none the wiser. It was quite a coup. That the backdrop of the action is real — that these are real teenage lives filling out the periphery, unaware of any artifice — adds a remarkable urgency to the proceedings. It's never totally apparent to what degree anything in *The Dirties* is an act. But what's important is that, fake or not, it all feels true. 9

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Matthew Miller  
Matt Johnson  
Evan Morgan  
Jared Raab  
**Written by**  
Matt Johnson  
Evan Morgan

**Story**  
Josh Boles  
**Director of Photography**  
Jared Raab  
**Edited by**  
Matt Johnson  
Evan Morgan

**Music Composed by**  
Jay McCarroll  
**Sound Design**  
Alexander Aslund  
**Costume Designers**  
Paul Tjepkema  
Derrick Gueren

**@Phase 4 Films**  
**Executive Producers**  
Step Johnson  
Alison Arnot

### CAST

**Matt Johnson**  
Matt

**Owen Williams**  
Owen  
**Krista Madison**  
Chrissy H.  
**Brandon Wickens**  
Jackman  
**David Matheson**  
Mr Muldoon

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]

**Distributor**  
Pulse Films

**7,444 ft +8 frames**

**Southern Ontario, present day. Matt is an outgoing but socially awkward high-school student who finds himself regularly mocked and abused by his classmates. Steeped in pop culture, he seems incapable of doing or saying anything that isn't a reference to a TV show, videogame or movie. Assigned to produce a short film as a class project, Matt channels his frustrations into 'The Dirties', in which he and his best friend Owen star as vigilante cops armed and out for revenge. A screening of the film in class makes Matt the object of further ridicule. As a result, Matt decides to produce a sequel, though he**

**reasons that the only way it will be taken seriously is if the violent retaliation against his bullies is followed through for real. Matt begins to plan a school shooting. Owen, initially eager to participate in what he assumes will be another fictional short, starts to suspect that Matt intends to go through with his plan. The two drift apart. After finalising an elaborate plan both for the killings and the film he intends to shoot around them, Matt arrives at school early and sets up cameras in the hallway. Approaching a bully, Matt draws a handgun and shoots him, causing the rest of his classmates to flee.**



## Fading Gigolo

Director: John Turturro  
Certificate 15 89m 53s

### Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

Not for the first time, actor-turned-director John Turturro has set himself a challenge. His latest film is an unclassifiable soft-sell character study of a small Brooklyn community that grafts a stage-whispering compère (Woody Allen) on to an odd-couple midlife romance. Where Turturro's similarly atypical blue-collar musical *Romance & Cigarettes* (2005) was rambunctious and entertained (even as it also mystified) with swivelling, histrionic camerawork, *Fading Gigolo* isn't half so eccentric, and is too sedate and safe to pull through its incongruities.

Turturro directs himself as Brooklyn florist Fioravante, whose name is put forward by his hard-up friend Murray (Allen) – without his permission, and with some embellishment of his gift for lovemaking – to join in a threesome with Murray's dermatologist Dr Parker (Sharon Stone) and her best friend Selima (Sofia Vergara). Not so much strong and silent as stolid, Fioravante agrees, and after a trial assignment with Dr Parker – who tips big – he and Murray decide to go into business together as pimp and high-end prostitute. They split the profits and assume pseudonyms for kicks. Within the world of the film, the fantasy is all Dr Parker's; without, in reality, it's a male-fantasy-founded joke that sees a so-so-looking middle-aged man trim flowers by day and at night, by prearrangement, go to bed with Sharon Stone and be paid for it. Still, this establishing phase of the film is the paciast, with Allen delivering in the funny-man role. (It's a role that bears the mark of his writing, making one wonder, did he advise?)

As a true-love narrative nudges out the older-man sex comedy, the film appears to lose the feeling in its feet. The friends' arrangement is endangered when Murray sets to work on the widowed Avigal (Vanessa Paradis) and convinces her to meet with Fioravante for massage therapy. She turns up for her appointment but cries at his touch: mother of six, married to a rabbi for 18 years, it's been some time. Of course, Fioravante falls for *this* woman, who though not a virgin is as good as new, and his feelings interfere with his sexual performance under professional circumstances. It may not sit comfortably with some members of the audience that while the



Enchanted florist: John Turturro

unavailable, orthodox Jewish Avigal in a sheitel – a wig worn in accordance with Jewish laws of modest dress – is irresistible, Fioravante's clients are characterised as rapacious and base, there to ogle and be appalled by, and whose appetites are all one. A cut-to scene sees Stone's Dr Parker shovelling snack food into her mouth as she telephones in her jealousy: she's finding it difficult to share, she says. When she and Fioravante bump into each other by chance in a bar, he wishes her a brusque happy birthday, already half-turning away. None of this is up for comment; everything is framed for laughs. Funny how the gender of the prostitute may change but the woman remains the humiliated party in the paying exchange for sex.

*Fading Gigolo* is a strange and slow film (for all the efforts of an energetic jazz score), confused by Allen's scene-stealing presence but draughty without it. He's like an outboard motor: he speeds things up but is essentially an accessory, and noisy to put a stop to. If consciously then illogically, Turturro has created in the character of Fioravante a man so impassive and so without kink that he's unlikeable. Liev Schreiber, on the other hand, as Dovi, the gentle giant who is also in love with Avigal, gives the only truly endearing and straight-comic performance. Idly sucking his Hasidic sidelocks, he suggests that there was some hope of making a good, warm film about the oddities of a Jewish municipality. In the end, this wasn't it. Ⓢ

## Heli

Mexico/France/Germany/The Netherlands/USA 2013  
Director: Amat Escalante  
Certificate 18 104m 52s

See Feature  
on page 44

### Reviewed by Pasquale Iannone

An unassuming car-factory worker finds himself embroiled in kidnapping, drugs and torture. It seems like the plot of a Liam Neeson

actioner and yet stylistically, Mexican director Amat Escalante's third feature *Heli* has all the hallmarks of a film-festival favourite: long takes, non-professional actors, desaturated colour palette, unflinching, deglamourised scenes of violence and frank sexuality.

The burgeoning career of 35-year-old Escalante has so far been entwined with that of his celebrated compatriot Carlos Reygadas. Escalante served as assistant director on Reygadas's *Battle in Heaven* (2005), while Reygadas was associate producer on Escalante's 2005 feature debut *Sangre* as well as 2008's *Los Bastardos*. Despite the close working relationship between the two filmmakers – in his 2013 book *Mex-Ciné: Mexican Filmmaking, Production and Consumption in the 21st Century*, Frederick Luis Aldama goes so far as to call Escalante Reygadas's "disciple" – there's no doubt that their authorial voices remain distinct. While Reygadas's films are very much in the modernist tradition of Andrei Tarkovsky – especially *Silent Light* (2007) and *Post Tenebras Lux* (2012) – Escalante's pictures, for all their formal daring, are more firmly grounded in (grim) sociopolitical reality.

*Heli* opens with an early-morning ride in a pickup truck. Two young men are bloodied, bound and gagged in the back. The truck stops at a footbridge in a deserted town, where one of the men is hanged. As the film progresses, we learn that this harrowing episode comes near the end of the story. Escalante winds back in time to introduce the titular protagonist (Armando Espitia), his wife Sabrina (Linda González) and their baby son. *Heli* is very much the dutiful husband and father, forced to shoulder responsibility before his years but rarely complaining as he cycles off to night shifts at the local car plant, meeting his father Evaristo (Rámon Álvarez) trudging back from the day shift.

Escalante contrasts *Heli*'s drudgery with the youthful spunk of Beto (Juan Eduardo Palacios), an army cadet who, at 17, can't be much younger than the protagonist but who has other things on his mind, namely taking the next step in his relationship with *Heli*'s sister Estela (Andrea Vergara). Despite Estela's very young age, there is real tenderness rather than anything sinister in scenes between the couple. They make plans to get married but Beto's theft of two bags of cocaine to fund their elopement has disastrous consequences. He is kidnapped along with Estela and *Heli*, and while the young girl is driven away, the two men are taken to be tortured.

The ensuing scenes – undoubtedly difficult to watch – are filmed dispassionately. Escalante packs each shot with small details that say much about a certain kind of disaffected, desensitised Mexican youth. Far from the sensationalism of torture porn, Escalante's approach is closer to the Arendtian 'banality of evil' seen in films such as Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* (1997). As Beto is hung on a hook, beaten and burned, one of the boys films the horrifying scene on his smartphone. In other shots of the room

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Jeffrey Kusama-Hinte  
Bill Block  
Paul Hanson  
**Written by**  
John Turturro  
**Director of Photography**  
Marco Pontecorvo  
**Editor**  
Simona Paggi  
**Production Designer**  
Lester Cohen  
**Music**  
Abraham Laboriel  
Bill Maxwell  
**Sound**  
Tod A. Maitland  
**Costume Designer**  
Donna Zakowska

**Production Companies**  
A QED International

presentation of  
an Antidote Films  
production  
A John Turturro Film  
**Executive Producers**  
Sasha Shapiro  
Anton Lessine  
Scott Fergusson  
Bart Walker

### CAST

**John Turturro**  
Fioravante  
**Woody Allen**  
Murray  
**Vanessa Paradis**  
Avigal  
**Liev Schreiber**  
Dovi  
**Sharon Stone**  
Dr Parker  
**Sofia Vergara**  
Selima

**Dolby Digital/DTS In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Curzon Film World

8,089ft +8 frames

**Brooklyn, the present. Struggling bookshop owner Murray is informed by his dermatologist Dr Parker that she and a girlfriend would like to have a threesome. Murray volunteers his friend – florist Fioravante – who indifferently consents. A preliminary one-to-one meeting with Dr Parker goes well, persuading Murray to start a gigolo service and solicit further female clients for Fioravante. The arrangement works, the pair splitting the profits, until Murray sends devout rabbi's widow Avigal to Fioravante for an oil massage. She cries at his touch. They meet twice more, and kiss. Falling for Avigal, Fioravante calls off the threesome midway into the assignment. Neighbourhood patrol officer Dovi, who also loves Avigal, realises what is going on and brings Murray before a tribunal of Hasidic elders; he confesses everything. Avigal defends her lapses: she was lonely. She and Fioravante say their goodbyes: she will marry Dovi, and Fioravante will leave the country. Murray attempts to change Fioravante's mind by pointedly chatting up an attractive girl in a café.**






The power of nightmares: Armando Espitia

where this takes place, we see a crucifix, a nude calendar, posters of Justin Bieber and Ferraris, and all the while a videogame continues running on a large flatscreen TV behind Beto's battered body.

Shot digitally, *Heli's* colour palette is purposely anaemic – pale blues, greys and browns; there are none of the warm tones of pictures such as Robert Rodriguez's early digital feature *Once*

upon a Time in Mexico (2003). Although the film does not have a conventional orchestral score, Escalante uses Lasse Marhaug's foreboding ambient piece 'Theme from Heli' in the opening scene and ties Los Pasteles Verdes' 70s version of the ballad 'Esclavo y amo' to the story of Estela and Beto. It is Estela we see in the lingering final shot, one that seems to offer a glimmer of hope and peace after the family's unspeakable trauma. 

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producer

Jaime Romandia

#### Written by

Gabriel Reyes

Amat Escalante

#### Director of

Photography

Lorenzo Hagerman

#### Editor

Natalia López

#### Production Designer

Daniela Schneider

#### Sound

Catriel Vildosola

#### Costume Designer

Daniela Schneider

©Mantarraya

Producciones,

Tres Tunas, Fondo

para la Producción

Cinematográfica de

Calidad (México),

Le Pacte, unafilm,

Lemming Film

#### Production

Companies

Mantarraya Tres

Tunas in association

with NODREAM

in coproduction with

Le Pacte, Consejo

Nacional para la

Cultura y las Artes

(CONACULTA), Fondo

para la producción

cinematográfica de

calidad (México),

unafilm, Lemming

Film, Ticomán,

Iké Asistencia

with the participation

of ZDF/Arte and

with the support of

Fonds Sud Cinéma,

Le Centre National

du Cinéma et de

l'Image Animée -

CNC, Ministère des

Affaires Étrangères

et Européennes -

Institut Français

(France), Film und

Medienstiftung NRW,

The Netherlands Film

Fund, Sundance/

NHK present a film

by Amat Escalante

### CAST

Armando Espitia

Heli

Andrea Vergara

Estela

Linda González

Sabrina

Juan Eduardo

Palacios

Beto

Reina Torres

Detective Maribel

Ramón Álvarez

Evaristo

### Dolby Digital

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

### Distributor

Network Releasing

9,438ft +0 frames

Mexico, the present. Heli lives with his wife Sabrina, baby son Santiago, father Evaristo and younger sister Estela in a house in the provinces. Both he and his father work at the local car plant. Twelve-year-old Estela is in a relationship with 17-year-old army cadet Beto, and the two plan to run away together and get married.

In a display of the authorities' tough stance on organised crime, a ceremony is arranged during which large quantities of drugs and counterfeit goods are burned by Beto and his fellow cadets. However, Beto helps himself to two bags of cocaine, intending to sell them to support his future life with Estela. The couple hide the drugs in Heli's rooftop water tank one night, only for Heli to later discover the stash. Furious, he disposes of the drugs and locks Estela in her room. A short time later, the house is raided by armed men and Evaristo is shot dead. Having already

captured Beto, the men kidnap Heli and Estela and dump Evaristo's body on a deserted road. Beto and Heli are taken to a house while Estela is driven away. In the house, before a group of listless teenage boys, Beto is hung on a hook, beaten and has his genitals set on fire. Heli is beaten too, though less severely. Both are driven to a footbridge where the men hang Beto but spare Heli. When he returns home, Heli is badly traumatised. Unable to cope, he loses his job and strikes out at his wife. After his initial silence, he tells the police the truth about the drugs.

Estela finally returns to the family home, seemingly unharmed, though unable to speak. She is pregnant, having been raped by one of her attackers. She draws a map of the place where she was held hostage. Heli goes there and beats a man to death. He returns home and makes love to his wife. In the next room, Estela cradles her baby nephew.

## In Bloom

Directors: Nana Ekvimishvili, Simon Gross

Certificate 15 101m 45s

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Nana Ekvimishvili drew on her own memories of growing up during the Georgian civil war of the early 1990s to write this rueful coming-of-age tale, which she co-directed with Simon Gross; they previously wrote Gross's *Fata Morgana* (2007) together.

At the film's centre are school friends Eka (Lika Babluani) and Natia (Mariam Bokeria), the former a watchful, moody type pining for a father locked up in prison, the latter a precocious beauty from a home environment of relentless strife. Absence or violence tends to generally define the male characters they know and encounter: local men regularly disappear to join the conflict raging in Abkhazia; schoolboys threaten Eka and harass Natia for her hand in marriage. Eventually, Natia just exchanges one bully for another, leaving her father's home to marry her boorish suitor Kote – though the extent of her choice in the matter is debatable, since she's kidnapped by Kote and his friends and forced into sex with him.

Violence, or the power to commit it, doesn't get a wholly bad rap here, however. It's the story's one kindly man, Natia's preferred boyfriend Lado, who supplies her with a gun, for her protection – "I think that guy really loves you," is Eka's approving response. Being endowed with this form of phallic power initially imbues Natia with a reckless confidence; and when the weapon is in Eka's possession, she finds the strength to intervene and save one of her own tormentors, Kopla (Giorgi Aladashvili), from a beating. But the gun is an ultimately negative presence, and the film builds its moral case inexorably towards the scene in which Eka rejects its temptations by throwing it away.

Kopla's grateful/resentful response at being saved by a girl – one whose family has a murky history with his own – and his subsequent shaky retreat into the rain provide one of the film's most effective moments. Another beautifully judged sequence comes when Lado, after a trip to Moscow, returns too late to woo the already married Natia;



Empire of the gun: Mariam Bokeria



# Journal of Film Preservation



The *Journal of Film Preservation* is published by the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) twice a year. It offers a forum for both general and specialized discussions on all theoretical, technical and historical aspects of moving image archival activities. Articles are written in English, French or Spanish, with summaries in the other two languages.

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★★★★★  
“A gentle surreal charm  
that’s hard to resist”  
Total Film



# SILENT SONATA

A FILM BY JANEZ BURGER

“Enough charm and brio to  
make it hard to resist”  
Sight & Sound

“A charming slice of  
magical realism”  
CineVue



[ CURZON  
MAYFAIR ] AND SELECTED  
CINEMAS  
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LEON  
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RENÉ  
BAZINET

DANIEL  
ROVAI

MARJUTA  
SLAMIC

LUNA ZIMIC  
MIJOVIC

MAKEUP DESIGN ALENKA NAHTIGAL SOUND ROBERT FLANAGAN, DANIEL BIRCH COMPOSER DRAGO IVANUŠA COSTUME DESIGN ALAN HRANITELJ PRODUCTION DESIGN VASJAKOKEJ EDITING MILOŠ KALUSEK DOP DIVIŠ MAREK  
CO-PRODUCERS PETRI ROSSI, FREDRIK ZANDER, TOMAS ESKILSSON PRODUCERS JOŽKO RUTAR, PETRA BAŠIN, MORGAN BUSHE WRITER AND DIRECTOR JANEZ BURGER



though the young performers' work here is patchy, Bokeria's response to encountering her character's true beloved is a perfect evocation of heady teenage desire. Elsewhere there are some lovely tableaux, such as the one in which a group of drinking and smoking girls arrange themselves rapidly into a picture of studious respectability when a parent arrives home early. But in between these moments there is too much that is flat and predictable. Open any festival programme at random and you've a good chance of hitting on a film that glares at grown-up conflict through a wise child's eyes; and the dramatic trope of tossing a gun into the hands of children and letting the audience wait for it to go off is a weary one. While it unquestionably stems from a sincere place, this bloom droops a little in the presentation, due to stylistic and structural overfamiliarity and a certain dearth of narrative energy. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

<b>Producers</b> Simon Gross Mark Wächter Guillaume de Seille Nana Ekvitishvili Christian Cloos Doris Hepp <b>Written by</b> Nana Ekvitishvili <b>Director of Photography</b> Oleg Mutu <b>Editor</b> Stefan Stabenow <b>Production Designer</b> Konstantine Japaridze <b>Sound</b> Irakli Ivanishvili <b>Costume Designer</b> Medea Bakradze	<b>CAST</b> <b>Lika Babluani</b> Eka <b>Mariam Bokeria</b> Natia <b>Zurab Gogladze</b> Kote <b>Data Zakareishvili</b> Lado <b>Giorgi Aladashvili</b> Kopla <b>Gia Shonia</b> Wakho <b>Ana Nijaradze</b> Ana, Eka's mother <b>Maiko Ninua</b> Sophiko, Eka's sister <b>Tamar</b> <b>Bukhnikashvili</b> Natia's mother <b>Temiko Chichinadze</b> Natia's father <b>Berta Khapava</b> Natia's grandmother <b>Endi Dzidzava</b> Kote's mother <b>Zaza Salia</b> Kote's father	<b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1] Subtitles  <b>Distributor</b> Artificial Eye Film Company  <b>9,157ft +8 frames</b>  Georgian theatrical title <b>Grzeli nateli dgeebi</b>
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Tbilisi, Georgia, 1992. Teenage friends Natia and Eka attend school and queue for bread for their families, while their country's civil war continues in Abkhazia, claiming many of the local men. Natia is courted by two youths, rough Kote and gentle Lado. Lado, before departing to visit an uncle in Moscow, gives Natia a gun for her protection. Exhilarated by the gun's power to frighten people, Natia forces it on a reluctant Eka so that she can protect herself against the bullies who regularly harass her. Eka refuses to accompany her mother to visit her father, who is in prison. Seeing one of her bullies, Kopla, being beaten, she brandishes the gun at his attackers and sees them off. While Eka and Natia are queuing for bread, Kote and his friends grab Natia and bundle her into a car. The people nearby fail to help; when Eka berates them, a man punches her. Natia marries Kote, leaves school and moves in with him and his parents. Lado returns and goes to see Natia, but Kote angrily intervenes and takes Natia away. Eka confronts her mother about a rumour that her own father killed Kopla's; her mother denies it. Eka visits Natia and finds that she is unhappy with Kote, who has made her give up her studies and her dreams of being a musician. The gun remains hidden in Kote's parents' bathroom. Kote and his friends pursue Lado and kill him. Natia, incensed and vengeful, goes to find the gun but Eka gets to it first and throws it into a lake. Eka visits her father in prison.

Legends of Oz  
Dorothy's Return

USA 2012, Directors: Will Finn, Daniel St. Pierre  
Certificate U 88m 11s

Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

*Legends of Oz: Dorothy's Return* is a CGI cartoon sequel to L. Frank Baum's 1900 story *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and the 1939 MGM musical version. This new cartoon adapts a 1989 book, *Dorothy of Oz*, by Baum's great-grandson Roger Stanton Baum. Despite being co-directed by Dan St Pierre and Will Finn, who are both experienced animators, it is an insipid, clumsily told film, with very little entertainment for grown-ups. Oz devotees may be offended from the opening scenes, which are supposedly set straight after *Wizard* but blithely update Dorothy to a nondescript present with cars and cops. (It would have been easy enough to tell the story about Dorothy's present-day descendant.) In the film's favour, some of the fantasy places that Dorothy finds on returning to Oz are true to the original book's whimsy – they include a land of talking sweets and the palace of a haughty princess who's made of china. The animation is inescapably bland but at least it's prettier than some recent cheap computer cartoons (2013's lamentable *Saving Santa*, for example). While there's nothing to harm young children, they may well yawn at the anodyne songs and surplus love story (between the china princess and a marshmallow soldier). The film's overcrowded cast includes Dorothy's old friends from *Wizard*, plus many new creations, as if the filmmakers hoped their numbers would hide the fact that the characters are painfully thin and mostly charmless. Only a flying monkey does reasonable business as the villain's henchman; in fact, he's rather funnier than the villain himself, a pantomime jester voiced by Martin Short. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Bonne Radford Ryan Carroll Roland Carroll <b>Screenplay</b> Randi Barnes Adam Balsam Based on the book <i>Dorothy of Oz</i> by Roger Stanton Baum <b>Editors</b> Dan Molina Stan Webb <b>Production Design</b> Daniel St. Pierre <b>Score by/Arranger</b> Toby Chu <b>Songs by</b> Bryan Adams Jim Vallence Tift Merritt Jim Dooley Mike Himelstein <b>Re-recording Mixers</b> David E. Fluhr Jeremy Peirson <b>Animation Director</b> Doug Williams <b>CG Imagery/ Animation</b> Prana Animation Studios  ©Dorothy of Oz, LLC and Summertime Entertainment	<b>Production Companies</b> Clarius Entertainment presents a Summertime Entertainment production A Carroll Brothers presentation <b>Executive Producers</b> Neil L. Kaufman Greg Centineo Rene Torres Stephen Hays Peter Graham  <b>Voice Cast</b> <b>Lea Michele</b> Dorothy <b>Dan Aykroyd</b> Scarecrow <b>Jim Belushi</b> Lion <b>Kelsey Grammer</b> Tin Man <b>Hugh Dancy</b> Marshal Mallow <b>Megan Hilty</b> china princess <b>Oliver Platt</b> Wiser the owl <b>Patrick Stewart</b> Tugg the tugboat <b>Bernadette Peters</b>	Glinda <b>Martin Short</b> the Jester/ the appraiser <b>Tracey Adams</b> Aunt Em  <b>Dolby Digital Colour by</b> Fotokem [2.35:1]  <b>Some screenings presented in 3D</b>  <b>Distributor</b> Signature Entertainment  <b>7,936 ft +8 frames</b>
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Immediately after her first adventure in the magic land of Oz, little girl Dorothy is summoned back to save Oz from the power-crazed Jester.

Next Goal Wins

United Kingdom 2014  
Directors: Mike Brett, Steve Jamison

Reviewed by Ashley Clark


The title of Mike Brett and Steve Jamison's wonderful documentary refers to a term widely employed in the non-professional arenas of school-playground and park football: if a time limit is approaching (perhaps the bell has signalled the end of break, or there's a reservation at the pub) and the players have lost count of the score, somebody will pipe up "Next goal wins!" and spark a frenzied rush for the clincher. There's more than a hint of this amateur-hour chaos about the American Samoa national football team, although the idea of them scoring a single goal frankly seems beyond reason. The opening credits revisit in merciless detail their 31-0 humiliation at the hands of Australia in 2001, while a series of screaming headlines and pundits decry them as the worst team ever. As the final goal trickles past hapless goalkeeper Nicky Salapu, he sinks to the turf in despair and a tone of tragicomic pathos is established. *Next Goal Wins* picks up with the team in the years after the defeat, and their fortunes have barely improved. They still can't win a game and the chastened Salapu has retired and moved to Seattle. His relocation spotlights a wider issue within the American Samoan community: although the film doesn't go into great detail about its colonial history, it's made clear that this small country currently operates as a feeder state for America (and specifically the US military). This pervasive sense of loss lends the film its aching undertow. Religious leaders hope that improvement in the national football team will result in more young men staying put, so their target is to qualify for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. The man handed this monumental (if not quite Sisyphian) task is 55-year-old Thomas Rongen, a Dutch-born, American-based coach, who is the only person to apply for the job. An eccentric, puce-faced disciplinarian with shades of Lee Marvin, Rongen gradually becomes the film's central focus. Thankfully Brett and Jamison refrain from emulating the overly mechanical construction of Oscar-winning American football doc *Undeclared* (2012), which turned its protagonist into a full-on white saviour and badly patronised its young black characters. Instead, the filmmakers portray Rongen warts and all (Basil Fawlty-esque meltdowns included), and are careful to include reactions from the American Samoans that range from bemusement to understandable irritation at his initial blunderbuss methods and lack of cultural sensitivity. It is gradually revealed that Rongen has a tale of his own: he lost his daughter to a car accident when she was 18 and the tragedy has influenced him to tackle challenges such as this one. The filmmakers skilfully interweave a number of compelling individual stories alongside Rongen's, the most fascinating of which concerns Jaiyah 'Johnny' Saelua: a member of the Fa'afafine (Samoa's 'third gender') and the first transgendered footballer to play in a men's World Cup qualifier. Saelua is given plenty of screen time to discuss her personal life, and it's remarkable to hear her praise the unstinting support she receives from her teammates. This





**The only way is up: Next Goal Wins**

information is particularly sobering when you consider contemporary British football's neolithic attitude to LGBTQ issues (the idea of a transgender professional footballer in the UK seems light-years away). It doesn't hurt for dramatic effect that Saelua happens to be a no-nonsense, tough-tackling defender, but this fact is never leveraged by the filmmakers to score cheap irony points.

The story and its characters all add up to documentary manna from heaven for the filmmakers, who fashion a finale that's strangely nailbiting even if you do know the outcome. Underdog stories have traditionally been the province of hokey football dramas from *Hotshot* (1987) to the *Goal!* trilogy (2005-09), but as this warm, consistently surprising and ultimately very moving film proves, the truth — if you'll pardon the use of a thumping cliché — is often stranger, and more entertaining, than fiction. 

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producers

Kristian Brodie  
Mike Brett  
Steve Jamison

#### Camera

Sean Hill  
Ben Marshall

#### Editor

Julian Quantrill

#### Original Music

Roger Goula

#### Sound

Sean Hill

Ben Marshall

©Next Goal Wins Ltd

#### Production Companies

An Agile Films and

Archer's Mark

production

#### Executive Producers

Myles Payne

David Staniland

#### In Colour

Distributor

Icon Film

Distribution

ft + frames

A documentary following the American Samoa national football team. The film opens with footage of the team losing 31-0 to Australia in a World Cup qualification game in 2001 — a record defeat in international football. They have been dogged by defeat ever since. In 2011, in time for the 2014 World Cup qualifying campaign, they hire Dutch-born coach Thomas Rongen, who introduces some overseas-based players. They narrowly fail to qualify but do win their first match after 30 straight defeats in 17 years.

## Noah

Director: Darren Aronofsky  
Certificate 12A 137m 44s

### Reviewed by Jonathan Romney

Perhaps the most abused word in cinema today is 'epic' — now routinely used to denote any film that spends more than a certain amount of its multimillion-dollar budget on CGI. Recent superhero films have tried, with weary repetitiveness, to justify the description by whipping up their spectacle to an apocalyptic scale, involving the rampant destruction of cities on a level recalling John Martin's 1850s painting *The Great Day of His Wrath* — itself the quintessential source image for an earlier school of authentically epic cinema, the Biblical retellings epitomised by Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1923 and 1956).


Much ridiculed as faux-pious bombast, films such as DeMille's nevertheless achieved a genuine edge of transcendence precisely by highlighting the very aspects of Hollywood cinema that might otherwise have seemed most mundane, by showing Moses not as an unapproachable patriarch but as a two-fisted action man — by making him Charlton Heston, in other words. The fact that Darren Aronofsky's *Noah* is played by Russell Crowe might have caused some anticipatory titters but actually proves to be one of the approachable and highly effective elements that make his film work. Crowe's presence as a muscular, tormented struggler, an antediluvian working stiff, gives *Noah* a human, even earthbound grounding that allows its considerable strangeness and ambition to take flight — makes it epic in the properly transcendental sense that DeMille would have recognised.

*Noah* is a film that will mean different things to different viewers: pure CGI blockbuster to some; risible kitsch to others; and to some, like *Variety*'s Justin Chang, who thoughtfully defended the film as a serious nonconformist engagement with theological issues, a genuine attempt to reinvent Biblical cinema for the age of digital overkill. Watching the film I felt myself fluctuating between all these responses, at moments barely able to engage with much other than the sheer hugeness of it but finally emerging to conclude that, yes, despite the

considerable quotient of sheer barminess, *Noah* is something substantial and different.

*Noah* is a dark, nightmarish vision of the Old Testament that finally has few affinities with the reassuring piety of the DeMille school. It aspires to a mode of properly visionary imagination, to which end Aronofsky and co-writer Ari Handel have consulted not just the Old Testament but also such non-canonical sources as the Book of Enoch. Hence much material that makes you scratch your head and think, "Wait a minute — I don't recall that being in the Bible." The most startling element, and the one that risks capsizing Aronofsky's vessel before it even sets sail, is the race of six-armed stone giants who actually do the work of hauling timber and assembling the ark; they are fallen rebel angels, creatures made of light who emerge in shambling, Quasimodo-like form after plummeting from the firmament into hot lava. Their presence from the start requires you to make the proverbial leap of faith, and once you've accepted them as a part of the myth, then you've essentially bought into the spirit of the film.

I use the word 'myth' advisedly, because the film presents itself not as the retelling of a familiar Bible story but as the presentation of a creation myth that has Biblical resonance but isn't limited in its meaning to simply expounding what we think we know about the ark. *Noah* seems determined to lift its narrative up off the level of the flatness and familiarity of the scriptural page and restore to the act of Biblical storytelling the dimension of visionary exaltation, of hallucinatory vastness. It is no doubt for this reason that Aronofsky strips his film of familiar Bible-epic iconography (no sandals and sand dunes here) and sets it in a world that's more like a parallel universe than a recognisable pre-Babel Middle East: characters dress like medieval warriors or post-apocalypse survivalists, and at one point we see cities that seem to belong to a technological sci-fi future.

Out of the slender material of the original Noah story, Aronofsky and Handel weave a complex and often fanciful saga that involves, among other things, a multitude of animals who obligingly allow themselves to be 



**Duty and the beasts: Russell Crowe**



lulled to sleep for the duration of the ark's voyage thanks to sleep-inducing incense. If this isn't a radical flouting of expectations, then nothing is – a Noah story largely without animals, not a craning giraffe's neck in sight.

The most intriguing role is that of Emma Watson's Ila, a woman fated, as partner to Noah's son Shem, to repopulate the earth but whose destiny is at odds with her awareness that she is apparently barren (as signified by a stigma-like scar on her belly). Thanks to miraculous intervention, she will eventually bear twins, and here's where the radical strangeness of the film's vision kicks in: Noah sees it as part of his God-given mission to slaughter those children, to stop humanity rising again and destroying the earth. This makes Noah a more complex, troubled and troubling figure than the simple agent of heroic deliverance we might expect: an extremist willing to destroy his own family and indeed species for the future of the planet.

Some will buy *Noah's* monumental nightmare vision absolutely, others reject it as the loopy kind of Hollywood excess, and then there will be those intrigued sceptics who will be willing to class it under the category 'Flawed Magnificence'. But what's finally impressive about *Noah* is the degree of unbending faith on which this massively ambitious venture is built. Aronofsky and his Noah share the same wild-eyed belief that it takes to build an ark, or make a movie (or, in some movies, to install a baseball field in the middle of nowhere): if you build it, they will come. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Producer</b> Scott Franklin Mary Parent Arnon Milchan	<b>Production Companies</b> Paramount Pictures and Regency Enterprises present a Protozoa Pictures production	<b>Anthony Hopkins</b> Methuselah <b>Douglas Booth</b> Shem <b>Marton Csokas</b> Lamech <b>Leo McHugh Carroll</b> Japheth
<b>Screenplay</b> Darren Aronofsky Ari Handel <b>Director of Photography</b> Matthew Libatique <b>Editor</b> Andrew Weisblum <b>Production Designer</b> Mark Friedberg <b>Music</b> Clint Mansell <b>Production Sound Mixer</b> Ken Ishii <b>Costume Designer</b> Michael Wilkinson <b>Visual Effects by</b> Industrial Light & Magic	<b>Executive Producers</b> Ari Handel Chris Brigham  <b>CAST</b> <b>Russell Crowe</b> Noah <b>Jennifer Connelly</b> Naameh <b>Ray Winstone</b> Tubal-Cain <b>Emma Watson</b> Ila <b>Logan Lerman</b> Ham <b>Dakota Goyo</b> young Noah	<b>Dolby Digital/Datasat/Dolby Atmos In Colour [1.85:1]</b>  <b>Distributor</b> Paramount Pictures UK  <b>12,396ft +0 frames</b>  <b>IMAX prints</b> 138m 48s 199,872 ft

The Biblical era. Lamech, descendant of Seth, is slain by Tubal-Cain, of the race of Cain. Years later, Lamech's son Noah, who lives peacefully with his wife Naameh and sons Shem, Ham and Japheth, receives a vision revealing that the earth will be destroyed by a flood. He builds an ark with the help of fallen angels. Shem finds a partner in Ila, but Ham becomes resentful when Noah allows the girl he likes to be killed by a stampeding crowd. Loaded with animals, the ark sets sail; Tubal-Cain stows away on board, helped by the rebellious Ham. Tubal-Cain wants humanity to survive but Noah believes the race should end; he attempts to sacrifice the twins that Ila – previously barren – has given birth to. The children are spared and the ark lands.

## Pantani The Accidental Death of a Cyclist

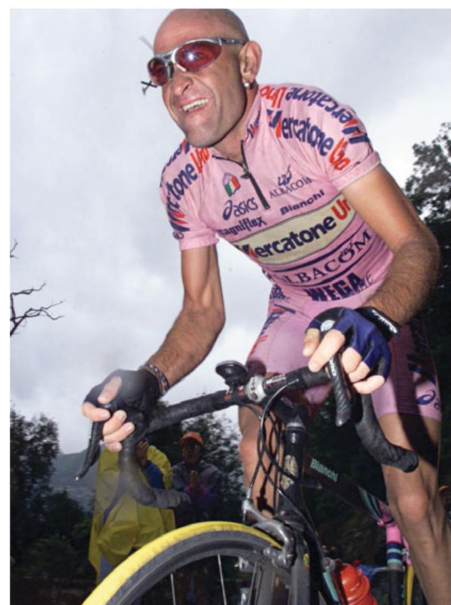
United Kingdom 2014  
Director: James Erskine  
Certificate: not submitted 92m

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Having already made feature documentaries about the England football team's exploits at the 1990 World Cup (*One Night in Turin*), the England-Australia cricket series in socially divided 1981 Britain (*From the Ashes*) and the famed 1973 tennis match between male chauvinist Bobby Riggs and feminist champion Billie Jean King (*The Battle of the Sexes*), director James Erskine certainly has a track record in reconstructing significant sporting events of the past. Needless to say, the spontaneity and unpredictability of the live occasion is lost in these hindsight chronicles, with analytical understanding and a grasp of the unfolding socio-historical impact presumably making amends.

Here, though, Erskine's purpose in exploring the rise and fall of the hugely talented Italian cyclist Marco Pantani, whose career ended in allegations of doping and who died aged 34 of a massive cocaine overdose, remains rather less clear. As a psychological study, the potential is obvious, since the courage and passion with which Pantani obliterated his rivals on the steepest of climbs were matched by an equally potent self-destructive streak after a blood test at the 1999 Giro d'Italia forever tarnished his reputation. In the days before mandatory crash helmets, Pantani's headscarf-and-earring combo earned him the nickname 'Il Pirata' and made him the sport's most charismatic and popular rider, but while his famous 1998 double victory in the Giro and the Tour de France remains unmatched by anyone since, the fans have been left wondering whether his was a natural talent demolished by the endemic doping culture of 1990s professional cycling, or if his terrible final trajectory indicated a man who knew he had betrayed his own youthful ideals.

Erskine, problematically, seems unwilling or unable to deliver definitive answers. He covers Pantani's early triumphs and legendary climbing exploits in a way that helps non-specialists understand the beauty of the cyclist's achievements, but he steers well clear of the doping issue until the 1999 test result forces the narrative to confront it. Even then Erskine does not commit to a yes-he-did or a no-he-didn't, instead floating various conspiracy theories



Sleazy rider: Marco Pantani

(including the possibility that organised crime wanted Pantani out of the race because he was impacting on betting revenues); nor does he prevail on colleagues, family or even Pantani's respected biographer Matt Rendell to deliver a straight on-camera response.

Maybe the filmmaker's motivation was to maintain the intrigue by seeming to keep an open mind, but given that the exposure of Lance Armstrong has intensified interest in understanding the doping excesses of the 1990s and beyond as a way of restoring the sport's credibility for the future, this non-judgemental approach comes across as rather wishy-washy. There's an argument to be made that if everybody was cheating, then Pantani's ability still shone through and he should be remembered as a truly remarkable competitor. Erskine's film isn't keen to pursue that angle either, leaving us with a whole array of accusations and recriminations but no definitive reading to differentiate between a tragic hero and just another doped cyclist best forgotten. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Victoria Gregory James Erskine <b>Written by</b> James Erskine <i>Inspired by The Death of Marco Pantani</i> by Matt Rendell	<b>Director of Photography</b> Joel Devlin <b>Editor</b> Arturo Calvete <b>Production Designer</b> Toby Stevens <b>Music</b>	Lorne Balfé <b>Sound</b> Antony Bayman  ©New Black Films Ltd <b>Production Companies</b> Goldcrest Films	International and 4Rights presents a New Black Films and Media Squared Films PLC production A James Erskine film <b>Executive Producers</b> Dominic Schreiber	Robert Jolliffe  <b>In Colour [1.85:1] with [2.35:1], [1.37:1]</b>  <b>Distributor</b> Soda Pictures	Not submitted for theatrical classification Video certificate: 15 Running time: 92m 7s
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A documentary tracing the rise and fall of Italian road cyclist Marco Pantani, the last man to win two key races, the Giro d'Italia and the Tour de France, in the same season. Using archive footage and interviews with family, colleagues and rivals, the film pieces together the progress of a talented youth whose flamboyant style involved racing up the steepest slopes to recover time lost on the flat. Turning professional, Pantani made a strong impression in his first season in 1994, but a near-fatal collision with a car in 1995 left him with career-threatening injuries. After a year of arduous rehab, he returned as 'Il Pirata' (thanks to a distinctive

headscarf and earrings), winning the Alpe d'Huez climb during the 1997 Tour. His form and popularity subsequently hit a peak during his 1998 Giro and Tour double victory, making him a national hero in Italy. However, though he proved almost unbeatable during the 1999 Giro, blood tests showed that he had a high level of red cells, indicating the likelihood of doping, and he was eliminated from the race. Although he rode well in the 2000 Tour, he retired from the race with stomach problems. His reputation tarnished by doping allegations, he never completed another major race. In 2004 he died, aged 34, after a presumed accidental cocaine overdose.



# Patema Inverted

Japan 2013  
Director: Yoshiura Yasuhiro  
Certificate PG 98m 28s

## Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

Like many cartoons, the Japanese animation *Patema Inverted* starts from a child's concept of reality. What if you fell to the other side of the earth, where everyone walks upside down? In this SF twist on the idea, the heroine Patema begins in an underground world, falling 'down' a chasm to the surface. Once there, she must hang on desperately to anything she can, or plunge into the clouds beneath. A surface-dweller appears, and the picture rotates 180 degrees to show what *he* sees: an upside-down girl being yanked up into the sky. "Don't fall!" she shrieks at him. "Fall where?" he asks reasonably.

Up and down have been subverted not only in *Gravity*-style space films but also in fantasies such as *Labyrinth* (1986), in which David Bowie strode around an Escher-esque castle, and *Inception* (2010), in which Paris rolled up on itself. *Upside Down* (2012), released in America and other territories last year, also has two characters pulled apart by competing gravities (though it hasn't had a British release at the time of writing).

In *Patema Inverted*, director Yoshiura Yasuhiro uses the same idea to drive a boy-meets-girl fantasy in which the pair *must* cling to each other for dear life, often floating in mid-air or jumping across the landscape like conjoined astronauts. It's a charming, funny image, dreamlike yet implicitly sexual, like a teenage take on the flying in *Peter Pan*. (The couple's entanglements subvert a cliché in Japanese cartoons, in which adolescents are often comically terrified of physical contact with the opposite sex.) The idea might seem better suited to a CGI film, but *Patema's* traditional animation gives the action an unpolished naivety that works.

Patema and Age (the boy) are introduced as generic outsiders, but their chemistry is established through a neat gag: Patema is beginning to trust Age but still keeps firing demands at him and interrupting the romantic music that is trying to build in the background.



For better or reverse: *Patema Inverted*

This broad cartoon joke rings true – Patema is coping with an impossibly terrifying situation and the film won't let us forget it. Later, it's Age who's subjected to the fear of falling and made wholly dependent on Patema, a reversal that is no less effective for being transparently schematic.

The film feels simplistic despite its deft twists, even compared to a Miyazaki children's cartoon such as *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (1986), one of its clear influences. (Both are cheerful anime adventures using the wide sky as a fantastical playground.) *Patema* has few important characters to distract from the youngsters' story (the villain is a finger-steeping, megalomaniac bully), and the final revelation leaves huge questions unanswered. And yet they don't really matter. Patema's and Age's journeys, to the bottom of the world and the top of the sky, are so much fun that the objections just fall away.

## Credits and Synopsis

### Producer

Ono Mikio

### Writer

Yoshiura Yasuhiro

Based on characters

by Chayama Ryusuke

### Music

Oshima Michiru

### Sound Design

Yamaoka Akira

### Character Design/

### Animation Director

Mataga Daisuke

### Costume Designer

Annindouhu

@Yasuhiro

YOSHIURA/

Sakasama Film

Committee

### Production

Company

### Purple Cow Studio

### Executive Producers

Miyata Masanori

Aki Takanori

Nagae Tsutomu

### VOICE CAST

Fujii Yukiyo

Patema

Okamoto Nobuhiko

### Age

Ohata Shintaro

### Porta

Masumoto Hiroki

Jaku

Uchida Maaya

Kaho

Kato Masayuki

Lagos

Fukumatsu Shinya

elder

### Hashi Takaya

Izamura

### In Colour

[1.85:1]

### Subtitles

### Distributor

Anime Ltd

8,862ft +0 frames

### Japanese

theatrical title

Sakasama no

Patema

A prologue shows buildings and people 'falling' into the sky.

Patema is a teenage girl in an underground world. Menaced by an upside-down figure, she tumbles into a chasm and finds herself on what seems to be the surface of the world – except that the sky is beneath her and she must cling to the ground to stop herself falling. Patema meets surface-dweller Age, a boy who stands on the ground but appears upside down to Patema.

Age's repressive society teaches that sinners fell into the sky, while true humans were saved. The sadistic ruler Izamura is hunting the sinful 'Inverts', and captures the children. However, Age encounters another Invert, a boy named Porta, who loves Patema. They attempt to rescue the

girl but Patema and Age plunge into the sky.

The youngsters slow down in the heavens, rising (or descending) to a giant factory that is upside down from Age's viewpoint. They find a flying machine created by Age's late father. Using the machine, Patema and Age return to the surface, and then to Patema's underground home. Izamura follows. A wall cracks and they break through to the earth's 'true' surface, where Izamura falls into the sky. It transpires that Izamura's people are the real Inverts. Patema's ancestors were scientists who catastrophically reversed the world's gravity while remaining immune to its effects. They then made an underground world to save the surviving humans. Now standing the right way up, Patema walks out on to the true surface, holding on to the inverted Age.

# Pluto

Republic of Korea 2012  
Director: Shin Suwon  
Certificate 15 107m 27s

## Reviewed by Nemo Kim

"There's no such thing as friends for us," declares Yujin, the number-one student at an elite high school in Shin Su-won's *Pluto*. "Friends are only for humans."

It's no surprise that in South Korea, a country where aeroplanes are forbidden to take off on the day of college entrance exams in order to reduce noise, the high school where cutthroat competition is the order of the day has become fodder for the horror and thriller genres (the *Whispering Corridors* series, *Bleak Night*, *The King of Pigs*). While previously this tended to involve the ghosts of students who had committed suicide due to bad grades, here schoolteacher-turned-director Shin capitalises on her personal experience to deliver a painfully realistic piece in which students become monsters by choice – not only bullying but raping and killing for grades. Another aspect of Korean society Shin draws on is the ever-increasing gap between rich and poor, and how that divides children at school – many outside Korea weren't aware that while Psy was doing his horse dance to 'Gangnam Style', kids in less privileged parts of the country felt let down that it was yet again the wealthy Gangnam district that was being showcased abroad as the face of Korean pop.

These aspects may seem mere novelties to western audiences but they turned the film into the focus of hot debate in its home country, with student and parent groups organising trips to see it at the cinema. And although *Pluto* begins with real-life scenes from college entrance exam day, the heart of the film lies not in its realistic depiction of over-zealous students but rather in its study of life as a series of dog-eat-dog competitions in an overtly materialistic society – something that is not uncommon in other parts of the globe.

The title is a reference to a class debate about Pluto, which the teacher depicts as an outcast in the solar system. June, a recent transfer to the school, identifies with it and studies its movements nightly while also using the telescope to ogle Mira, a girl he has a crush on, who belongs to a clique of top students. David Lee (*Poetry*) is once again cast as the troubled teen, and despite his recent remark that



Top of the class: David Lee



he “would like to play a happy, cheerful adult for once”, his fine performance is what drives the film. Also of note is Sung June as Yujin, who provides a sardonic counterpart to June and turns out to be more human than the other conniving clique members.

The script is almost flawless in the original Korean, reflecting contemporary teen slang and drawing on the Gangnam register for the nouveau-riche parents, although these details are sadly lost in the English subtitles. And although the film is crisply edited by Lee Do-hyun, the rather excessive flashbacks and overlong final ten minutes could have been tighter. Where Shin succeeds is in her painfully astute study of the elite high school as a microcosm of Korean society. Just like their money-obsessed parents, seemingly bored by the constant threat from North Korea, students scribble away in the classroom, oblivious to the bomb-blasting that’s part of defence training against the north. What is horrifying are Shin’s claims that things are much harsher at Korean schools in real life, and online comments from teachers and students seem to echo this sentiment.

With a meagre budget of £260,000, Shin delivers a taut, emotionally driven thriller, rich in social messages for greedy adults and adults-to-be everywhere. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producer**  
Francis Lim  
**Written by**  
Shin Su-won  
**Cinematographer**  
Yun Ji-un  
**Edited by**  
Lee Do-hyun  
**Production Designer**  
Sakong Hee  
**Music**  
Ryu Jae-ah  
**Sound Design**  
Kim Su-hyun  
**Costume Designer**  
Kim Da-jeong

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**Production Companies**  
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in association with

CJ Entertainment  
a SH Film/June  
Film production  
KOFIC - Korean  
Film Council,  
IFC - Incheon Film  
Commission  
**Executive Producer**  
Shin Shang-han

#### Cast

**David Lee**  
Kim June  
**Sung June**  
Yujin Taylor  
**Kim Kkob-bi**  
Jung Sujin  
**Kim Kwon**  
Han Myung-ho  
**Cho Sung-ha**  
senior detective  
**Yu Kyung-soo**

Park Jung-jae  
**Sun Ju-ah**  
Kang Mira  
**Nam Tae-boo**  
Choi Bo-ram  
**Oh Jungwoo**  
Kang Changmin

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Third Window Films  
  
**9,670 ft +8 frames**

**South Korea, present day. June is a working-class transfer student at an elite high school, where he is ostracised by pupils and teachers alike. His only friends are Sujin, a fellow outsider, and the introverted Changmin.**

**Sujin hacks into the school computer network and puts sinister messages on the students’ computer screens; he is attacked by an unknown assailant with a baseball bat and is hospitalised. June finds out that his place at the school became available due to the suicide of a female student. After a humiliating initiation ritual, June manages to join the school’s elite clique. Yujin, the top student, confides in him that the female student committed suicide after he threatened to upload on to the internet the footage of her rape by a masked rapist, and that in fact he raped her in order to topple her off the top spot. The other clique members force June to join them in their mission to kill Yujin, after which June is framed as the main suspect.**

**The film concludes as June lights a homemade bomb, with the wailing of parents heard outside the school building.**

## Pompeii

Germany/Canada/USA 2014  
Director: Paul W.S. Anderson  
Certificate 12A 104m 20s

### Reviewed by Jason Anderson

Given how the fiery, panic-ridden destruction of a city has become a staple event in everything from superhero blockbusters to ‘bro’ comedies such as *This Is the End* (2013), it’s surprising that it took so long for this post-9/11 cycle of urban calamity to turn to one of history’s greatest kabooms. On a day in late August in AD 79, the eruption of Mount Vesuvius destroyed the Roman city of Pompeii and several surrounding towns – the force of the blast has been estimated at 100,000 times that of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Though the event was documented by Pliny the Younger, it wasn’t until 1748 that Pompeii began to gain wider fame due to the site’s rediscovery.

You’d have thought that a disaster-merchant like Roland Emmerich would’ve gotten around to the story by now – instead, his one detour into antiquity yielded the relatively explosion-free *10,000 B.C.* (2008). Roman Polanski worked extensively on an adaptation of Robert Harris’s historical novel *Pompeii* but the project ran aground in 2007; a few years later Ridley Scott reportedly enlisted Robert Towne to work on a TV miniseries of Harris’s book. But they have been beaten to the screen by this unabashedly derivative but satisfyingly robust effort from Paul W.S. Anderson and his German and Canadian production partners on the *Resident Evil* franchise (starring Anderson’s wife Milla Jovovich).

Of course, many others have travelled along these lava flows already. Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s 1834 novel *The Last Day of Pompeii* has been adapted for the screen many times, the most prominent example probably being *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1984), a lavishly mounted US miniseries that put Ernest Borgnine and Franco Nero in togas. Rather more dignified was the BBC’s *Pompeii: The Last Day* (2003), a ‘dramatised documentary’

drawing on more recently discovered sources.

Working from a script by the *Batman Forever* team of Janet Scott Batchler and Lee Batchler and *Sherlock Holmes* scribe Michael Robert Johnson, Anderson is largely unencumbered by any urge to remain faithful to historical accounts beyond following the disaster’s general timeline. On the other hand, he is remarkably fastidious about adhering to the templates of more recent inspirations. With its tale of young lovers separated by class and imperilled by a looming catastrophe, *Pompeii* does everything it can to ape *Titanic* (1997) short of including a Céline Dion song. Meanwhile, hero Milo’s experiences in the arena blatantly evoke those of Russell Crowe’s Maximus in *Gladiator* (2000), even if Anderson’s typically slick combat scenes owe more to the ultra-stylised mayhem of *300* (2006) and the US TV series *Spartacus*. Slightly more subtle is Anderson’s nod to *The Defiant Ones* (1958) when Milo and fellow gladiator Atticus make clever use of the chains that bind them together in order to defeat their better-armed opponents.

The presence of Kit Harington in the lead will have other viewers thinking of *Game of Thrones*. Alas, the character of Milo demands far less of Harington than his TV role as the brooding yet admirably intrepid Jon Snow. Being noticeably smaller than many of his fellow combatants, he isn’t especially convincing as an all-conquering gladiator either. He fares better in his romantic scenes with Emily Browning as Cassia, though she too lacks the will or opportunity to chew the soon-to-be-flaming scenery with the same aplomb as some of the supporting players. As was the case even in Pliny the Younger’s day, the villain gets all the decent lines. Thankfully Kiefer Sutherland, as scheming Roman senator Corvus, relishes every last one of them. Meanwhile Jared Harris, finding the 24



Lava’s in the air: Kiefer Sutherland



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star in the role he is usually accorded, can only look on in envy as he awaits the inevitable demise of his character Severus.

Viewers may also grow impatient for Vesuvius to blow. Anderson has no little fun teasing viewers with minor eruptions before unleashing the volcano's fury. The ensuing symphony of destruction includes flaming hunks of rock falling from the sky, angry winds full of fire and ash, and even a few giant waves. The fact that none of this is enough to distract Corvus from his pursuit of Milo and Cassia confirms Anderson's effort as unadulterated hokum, but at least it's delivered with some panache.

Unfortunately for the director and his producers, their first fully fledged disaster movie may itself be a disaster judging by the poor box-office results in North America and Germany. But should some future team of archaeologists find a DVD of *Pompeii* preserved in one of our own ruined cities, they should enjoy it just fine. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Jeremy Bolt  
Paul W.S. Anderson  
Robert Kulzer  
Don Carmody  
**Written by**  
Janet Scott Batchler  
Lee Batchler  
Michael Robert  
Johnson  
**Director of Photography**  
Glen MacPherson  
**Edited by**  
Michele Conroy  
**Production Designer**  
Paul Denham  
Austerberry  
**Music**  
Clinton Shorter  
**Sound Mixer**  
Greg Chapman  
**Costume Designer**  
Wendy Partridge  
**Visual Effects**  
Mr. X Inc.  
**Stunt Co-ordinator**  
Jean Furettre

©Constantin Film International GmbH and Impact Pictures (Pompeii) Inc.  
**Production Companies**  
Tristar Pictures and FilmDistrict present a Constantin Film International/Impact Pictures (Pompeii) production with assistance of Government of Canada and Ontario Media Development Corporation  
**Executive Producers**  
Martin Moszkowicz  
Peter Schlessel  
Jon Brown

### CAST

**Kit Harington**  
Milo  
**Carrie-Anne Moss**  
Aurelia

**Emily Browning**  
Cassia  
**Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje**  
Atticus  
**Jessica Lucas**  
Ariadne  
**Jared Harris**  
Severus  
**Kiefer Sutherland**  
Corvus

**Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Some screenings presented in 3D**

**Distributor**  
EI Films

**9,390ft +0 frames**

A brief prologue introduces Milo, the sole survivor of a clan of Celtic horsemen slaughtered in Britannia by a Roman army battalion led by Corvus.

Pompeii, AD 79. Now a slave, Milo is gaining renown for his gladiatorial skills. He is on a march to fight in Pompeii when he is noticed by Cassia, a young noblewoman who is returning to her parents Aurelia and Severus after a sojourn in Rome. Milo is brought to her family's home as part of the entertainment at a reception for Corvus, now a powerful Roman senator. Severus hopes that Corvus will support his plans to modernise Pompeii. When Cassia's favourite horse, frightened by seismic activity in the countryside, returns to his stable in a state of agitation, Milo impresses Cassia by calming the animal. Cassia's interest in the slave angers Corvus, whose true objective in coming to Pompeii is to force Severus to give him Cassia's hand in marriage. Severus does so reluctantly. Corvus plans to ensure that his romantic rival dies fighting in the coliseum but Milo survives thanks to his allegiance with reigning champion Atticus. Events in the coliseum are interrupted by the first rumblings from Mount Vesuvius. Milo escapes and rescues Cassia from the house where she is being held captive by Corvus, and together they try to flee the city. A fight leaves Corvus dead but the lovers are unable to get clear of the catastrophe. Their ash-covered bodies are preserved in an embrace.

## Pulp A Film about Life, Death and Supermarkets

United Kingdom 2014  
Director: Florian Habicht

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

"'Tidying up' isn't the greatest rock 'n' roll motivation," shrugs Jarvis Cocker, only prepared to admit that Pulp's December 2012 farewell concert in Sheffield will be a neat finish rather than an emotional final thank-you to the band's hometown.

While the gig forms the core of director Florian Habicht's endearing, witty and generous look at Pulp's homecoming, this is neither a conventional concert film nor a band's-eye-view of a triumphal return. Habicht and Cocker's concept offers Sheffield itself joint top billing, enlisting ordinary folk to reflect on the band's relationship with the city.

Habicht has a gift for coaxing engaging, quirky vox pops from passers-by, honed by the crowd-sourced plot he wheedled out of New Yorkers for his previous film, the almost too cute *Love Story* (2011). Sheffield – where, as bassist Steve Mackey points out, "It was alright" passes as high praise – throws up gems such as elderly Josephine, stoutly defending Pulp against Blur ("Better words and melodies") and dryly whimsical local musician Bomar Faery, for whom Pulp is the cure for whatever ails you, be it muggers or madness.

That said, there's a certain amount of banality proffered, whether from diehard fans ("I have Pulp underwear – I like to have 'Jarvis' on my bum") or school kids visibly struggling for an opinion. Rather better are the community performances, where the song doesn't remain the same, as local choirs and street dance troupes add their own interpretations – funny, poignant, heartfelt – of Pulp hits. An acoustic version of 'Help the Aged', performed in a Martin Parr-style

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producer**  
Alex Boden  
**Written by**  
Peter O'Donoghue  
Florian Habicht  
**Concept by**  
Jarvis Cocker  
Florian Habicht  
**Director of Photography**  
Maria Ines Manchego  
**Editor**  
Peter O'Donoghue

**Sound Recordist**  
Mark Bull  
  
©AF Pictures Limited  
**Production Companies**  
A Pistachio Pictures production in association with Altitude Film Sales, British Film Company, Screen Yorkshire and Soda Pictures

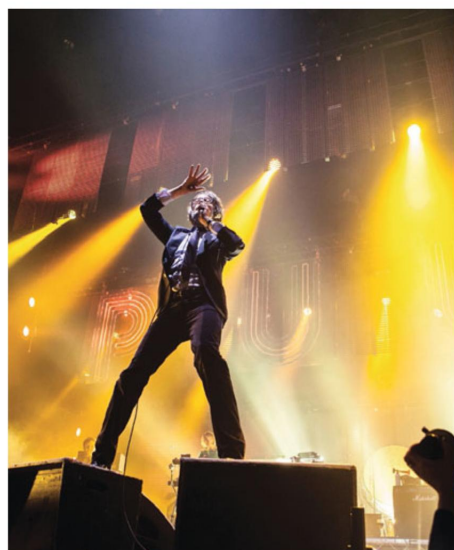
A Florian Habicht film  
**Executive Producers**  
Will Clarke  
Mike Runagall

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]

**Distributor**  
Soda Pictures

A documentary about Pulp, focusing on the final concert of the band's 2012 comeback tour at the Motorpoint Arena in their hometown of Sheffield.

Footage from the concert is intercut with director Florian Habicht's vox pops about Pulp conducted with Sheffield residents. Diehard fans explain why they crossed continents for the show. Band members Candida Doyle and Steve Mackey discuss their nerves about performing in Sheffield. An OAP praises Pulp lyrics, a community choir sings 'Common People', and a street dance troupe performs to 'Disco 2000'. Critic Owen Hatherley praises frontman Jarvis Cocker's songs about sex; there are clips of the band's disastrous 1988 Sheffield farewell concert. Cocker reveals the mental liberation of live performance. Mackey reflects that their album 'This Is Hardcore' was an escape from pop conformity. A choir performs 'Help the Aged', arranged as a café tableau. Over archive performance footage, Cocker talks about his unease with Britpop fame. The film climaxes with the concert's spectacular finale, the band playing 'Common People' to an ecstatic audience.



Man of steel: Jarvis Cocker

café tableau by elderly singers nonchalantly reading tabloid papers, makes for a delicious moment. It all takes place in a Sheffield seen through a Pulp prism: not the Steel City but Sex City, as their song says, the camera lingering on the brutalist tower blocks, furred-up canals and bus shelters so prominent in their lyrics.

Habicht isn't as handy with the concert footage, which though lively and atmospheric lacks the heady, together-again energy that Shane Meadows whipped up from the reunited Stone Roses for last year's *Made of Stone*. And while candid confessions dominated Blur's reunion 2010 film *No Distance Left to Run*, this skates over Pulp's personal history too, ignoring the band's role in Britpop, bar how uncomfortable fame made them feel. Cocker aside, Pulp band members largely shun the limelight, contributing a few laconic thoughts about playing live (though keyboardist Candida Doyle is open about how arthritis and age have made her wary of performing). Owen Hatherley, whose slim book about Pulp bulges with social and historical insights, is frankly wasted proffering a two-line comment about how Jarvis writes good sex songs. Sex, as the fuel for Cocker's songs of provincial voyeurism, stalking and infidelity, performed on stage in his porno-panto bouts of striptease and lascivious mime, is much in evidence here. Politics, apart from the let's-play-poor satire of 'Common People', hardly figures, despite Pulp's back-catalogue bulging with caustic dissent.

Unsurprisingly, Jarvis Cocker bestrides the whole enterprise like a corduroy-clad Colossus. His concept may gift screen time to others – but what they mostly talk about is Jarvis. In particular, that transformation from dry, self-effacing national treasure to geek-sex-god on stage, a striking contrast that Habicht captures effectively. Yet there's little in Cocker's revelations about the glorious mindlessness of performing that he hasn't said in innumerable other interviews. He's been doing this since 1978, and understands the key relationship between a pop persona and longevity. As sometime Pulp guitarist Richard Hawley observes, "Marriages and governments don't last as long as Pulp have." **S**



## The Punk Singer A Documentary Film about Kathleen Hanna

USA 2013, Director: Sini Anderson, Certificate 15 81m 21s

### Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

"Girls to the front!" Kathleen Hanna's impassioned scream from the small stage of a punk venue sometime in the early 1990s sums up both the riot grrrl movement of which Hanna was a founding figure and Sini Anderson's playful and powerful documentary. Looking back at how a vital movement came into being when *Time* was declaring feminism dead (courtesy of Ally McBeal), the film also opens up the present moment, in which heroes of punk adolescence such as Kim Gordon, Joan Jett and Hanna herself are cultural elders examining their role as leaders and its attendant pressures.

Media coverage of riot grrrl, the punk-rock feminist movement that emerged in the 1990s in northwest America, tended to the sensationalist and prurient, declaring, for example, that Hanna had been raped by her father – an accusation she unpacks, painfully, for the camera. Inspired by riot grrrl's punk-inspired zine culture, Anderson adopts a number of its strategies: the interweaving of the personal and political, and a commitment to raw honesty that also deals with, as Hanna says, "this certain assumption: when a man tells the truth, it's the truth; as a woman, there's always a negotiation, an assumption I'm exaggerating." Hanna's sharp turn of phrase and deprecating intelligence is on show throughout, whether in the lyrics of her 38 songs on the soundtrack, or when describing the dead silence at the 1999 MTV music awards, after Adam Horovitz of the Beastie Boys, Hanna's partner, has called out the industry for fostering rape culture, as "beyond 'who farted?'"

Anderson's second strategy for celebrating Hanna's work in the manner in which it was made includes an innovative piecing together of different performances of a given song to create a through-sung music video, starting with the anthemic 'Rebel Girl'. While the film is roughly linear, using a chronological structure to show the development of Hanna's work, these montages create an appealing atmosphere of creatively chaotic continuity. As a whole, the film is edited like a zine, collaging together the wealth of textual, photographic and video documentation produced by the small DIY feminist zine scene for which self-documentation was a survival strategy.


In 1994, while fronting her first band Bikini Kill, Hanna called for a media blackout – a risky strategy – but this is balanced by the buoyant fan culture that provides archival material for Anderson's film, including two documentaries from the moment: Abby Moser's *Grrrl Love and Revolution: Riot Grrrl NYC* (2011) and Tamra Davis's short *No Alternative Girls* (1994). This, along with interviews with scene



Riot on: Kathleen Hanna

participants such as Lynnee Breedlove and cultural historians such as Sara Marcus, again creates a welcome sense of continuity and community.

While the film does not directly address the debates that fragmented the riot grrrl movement and mired Hanna's later band Le Tigre (about racism and transphobia, respectively), it explores them obliquely through positive inclusion. Feminist activist Jennifer Baumgardner locates the origin of each of American feminism's first three waves in solidarity with emancipation, then civil rights, and finally in response to 'Becoming the Third Wave', an article in *Ms.* in 1992 by the writer Rebecca Walker; while Breedlove, the former lead singer of riot grrrl band Tribe 8 who has transitioned, speaks through his presence for a riot grrrl/trans alliance.

Funded by a Kickstarter project, *The Punk Singer* has the feel of a grassroots community project, emerging from the urgent question, "Where is Kathleen Hanna when we need her?" It's a supreme irony that Hanna, who wrote 'They Want Us to Make a Symphony out of the Sound of Women Swallowing their Own Tongues' with Le Tigre, was unable to speak at a Planned Parenthood rally after being struck down by Lyme disease. But as a video shot by Horovitz makes clear, Hanna has recently combined disability activism with feminist activism, using the film to create awareness of the disease, now epidemic in the US. "As a woman," she sang in Bikini Kill, "I was taught to be hungry." And Anderson's film – a scrappy, exuberant battler like its subject – shows how Hanna has transmuted a hunger borne of body-image pressure into a hunger to change the world. 

## Reaching for the Moon

Brazil 2013


Director: Bruno Barreto

Certificate: not submitted 114m

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Rarely has a film been so clearly intended to bear a title other than the one that has ended up on its poster. *Reaching for the Moon* would much better have been called *The Art of Losing* – a well-known phrase from the most famous poem by its main subject, Elizabeth Bishop. Bishop (Miranda Otto) reads the poem – 'One Art' – in the film's opening and closing scenes; in between, the story of her extended stay in Brazil and love affair with architect and heiress Lota de Macedo Soares (Glória Pires) very much deals with people skilled at creating losses for themselves, not, as the chosen title suggests, dauntless questers after glory and romance.

Bishop, in her forties, is horrified by her own success, frosty in the face of affection and permanently susceptible to the cold comfort of an alcoholic blackout. Soares, meanwhile, becomes intrigued by and sexually attracted to her only on hearing that rejection by her once drove a lover to suicide – a story that foreshadows Soares's own ultimate fate. *Reaching for the Moon*, then, rather than the moon. Presumably the chosen title represents someone's effort to disguise the story of Bishop and Soares's troubled relationship as an upbeat romance, but it's an incongruously whimsical imposition on a portrait of distinctly unwhimsical people. Marketing will have its way; in the film's trailer, a scene of a blitzed Bishop being held up by Soares and her resentful live-in ex-girlfriend Mary (Tracy Middendorf) has been cut to look like a shot of loved-up girlfriends on a fun night out.

A similar mismatch of content and presentation affects the film throughout: a rather small, hard story has been mounted as though it were lushly weepy melodrama (fittingly for Pires, who is one of Brazil's biggest soap stars – which might also explain how the film got such swish production values). This dissonance can operate to interesting effect. Within beautifully lit and designed rooms, against gorgeous landscapes, contained by a succession of immaculate outfits, Bishop's brittleness, self-involvement and resistance to happiness are emphasised unto grotesqueness, like nasty whispers echoing in cavernous spaces, while Soares emerges as a compulsive maker of empty gestures, whose vast, airy creations foster domestic apartness rather than intimacy. "It's like being outside!" enthuses Mary of Soares's design for their home, little realising 



Beautiful losers: Miranda Otto

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Tamra Davis  
Gwen Bialic  
Alan Oxman  
Rachel Dengiz  
Erin Owens

#### Directors of Photography

Jennie Jeddy  
Moria Morel  
Edited by  
Bo Mehrad  
Jessica Hernandez

#### Sound Mix

Quentin Chiappetta

©Opening Band  
Films LLC

#### Production Companies

An Opening Band film  
Long Shot Factory,  
Bird in the Hand  
Productions  
Film Extracts  
*Grrrl Love* and

*Revolution: Riot  
Grrrl NYC* (2011)

In Colour  
[1.78:1]

Distributor  
Dogwoof

7,321ft +8 frames

Kathleen Hanna, lead singer of Bikini Kill and Le Tigre and a foundational figure of the riot grrrl movement, stopped performing in 2005. This documentary offers an overview of her formative years, her career in music and her activism, as well as her subsequent struggles with Lyme disease and her recent return with new band The Julie Ruin. The film draws on video footage of Hanna's performances and includes revealing interviews with Hanna, her bandmates, fellow musicians such as husband Adam Horovitz, Kim Gordon and Joan Jett, and riot grrrl participants and observers.





that she will soon be the one pushed outside by Soares and Bishop's affair.

The film stays lovely to look at but loses narrative focus as it meanders through the petty, peevish relationship power games that comprise its middle third. There's no main thread of interest or action – just a succession of little tantrums thrown by one controlling, depressive partner or the other. The script is eloquent on Bishop's and Soares's various shortcomings but less sharp on what holds them together for 15 years. Meanwhile, a rich potential source of context and drama – the 1964 military coup, with which Soares is tangentially involved through her work with politician Carlos Lacerda – is brushed aside. Performances are deeply enough felt, however, for interest in the characters' respective destinies to survive the rather ineffectual organisation of biographical material. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producer

Lucy Barreto  
Paula Barreto

#### Screenplay

Matthew Chapman  
Julie Sayres

Based on the screenplay by

Carolina Kotscho

inspired by the

novel *Flores raras e banalíssimas* by

Carmen L. Oliveira

#### Director of

Photography

Mauro Pinheiro Jr

#### Film Editor

Leticia Giffoni

#### Production Design

José Joaquim Salles

#### Music

Marcelo Zarvos

#### Sound Design

Alessandro Laroça

#### Costume Design

Marcelo Pies

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#### Production

Companies

#### An LC Barreto

production in

association with

Imagem Filmes,

Globo Filmes,

Teleimage,

Globosat, Telecine

#### Executive

Producers

Romulo Marinho Jr

Penny Wolf

#### CAST

Miranda Otto

Elizabeth Bishop

Glória Pires

Lota de Macedo

Soares

Tracy Middendorf

Mary

Marcello Airoldi

Carlos Lacerda

Lola Kirke

Margareth

Tânia Costa

Dindinha

Marianna

Mac Niven

Malu

#### Marcio Ehrlich

Jose Eduardo Soares

Treat Williams

Robert Lowell

#### Dolby Digital

In Colour

[L85:1]

#### Part-subtitled

#### Distributor

Peccadillo Pictures

Not submitted

for theatrical

classification

Video certificate: 12

Running time:

113m 50s

Brazilian

theatrical title

*Flores raras*

## Rio 2

USA 2014

Director: Carlos Saldanha

Certificate U 101m 63s

### Reviewed by Sam Davies

*Rio* (2011) lacked the imagination of the weakest Pixar effort, or even the scripting of second-rank titles such as *Ice Age* or *Madagascar*, which at least aspired to an *Airplane!*-style turnover rate of corny gags. But with box-office receipts of nearly half a billion dollars, this sequel became inevitable. What's uniquely dismal about *Rio 2* is that the ideas it recycles seem almost deliberately drawn from other sequels. A pair of animals learn they're not the last of their species after all: see *Ice Age 2*. Urban animal used to all mod cons struggles hilariously in ancestral habitat: *Madagascar Escape 2 Africa*. Absurd interspecies romantic subplot: *Madagascar 2* again. *Rio 2* also has its hero battling to impress his alpha-male father-in-law, returning to a seam of humour the *Meet the Parents* franchise has strip-mined, fracked and nuked from orbit. One of *Rio 2*'s many flightless jokes has Blu, its macaw hero, unable to let go of his beloved satnav device – a useful metaphor for the film as a whole, which might have been plotted and written according to a series of programmed instructions on getting from A to B with lifeless efficiency. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Bruce Anderson

John C. Donkin

#### Screenplay

Don Rhymer

Carlos Kotkin

Jenny Bicks

Yoni Brenner

#### Story

Carlos Saldanha

Cinematographer

Renato Falcão

#### Edited by

Harry Hittner

#### Music

John Powell

#### Supervising

Sound Designer

Randy Thom

#### Supervising

Animators

James Bresnahan

Melvin Tsing

Chern Tan

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Century Fox Film

Corporation (in all

territories except

Brazil, Italy, Japan,

Korea and Spain)

©TCF Hungary

Film Rights

Exploitation Limited

Liability Company

and Twentieth

Century Fox Film

Corporation (in

Brazil, Italy, Japan,

Korea and Spain)

#### Production

Companies

Twentieth Century

Fox Animation

presents a Blue Sky

Studios production

#### Executive Producer

Chris Wedge

#### VOICE

#### CAST

Anne Hathaway

Jewel

Jesse Eisenberg

Blu

Jemaine Clement

Nigel

Kristin Chenoweth

Gabi

will.i.am

Pedro

George Lopez

Rafael

Bruno Mars

Roberto

Leslie Mann

Linda

Rodrigo Santoro

Tulio

Rita Moreno

Aunt Mimi

Tracy Morgan

Luiz

Jake T. Austin

Fernando

Andy Garcia

Eduardo

*Rio de Janeiro, the present. Blu and Jewel, apparently the last surviving pair of blue Spix's macaws, are living in a sanctuary with their three baby birds. When they learn that ornithologist Tulio and Blu's former owner Linda may have discovered more of their species deep in the Amazon rainforest, the family decide to join the hunt. In the jungle, Blu and Jewel find more blue macaws – an entire tribe, led by Jewel's father, whom she had thought dead; Blu struggles to gain his acceptance. When Blu learns that illegal loggers are about to destroy the macaws' habitat, he seeks out Tulio and Linda to enlist their help. Finding them captured by the loggers, he frees them and leads the macaws in a showdown in which the humans are scared off and the macaws' grove is saved.*

## Run & Jump

Ireland/Germany/USA 2013

Director: Steph Green

Certificate 15 105m 53s

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

"When Con and I looked at something, we saw the same thing," says Vanetia Casey (Maxine Peake) of her former bond with her husband Conor (Edward MacLiam), whose personality has been altered by a stroke. "Did you ever have that kind of connection with someone?" Steph Green's feature debut, co-written with Ailbhe Keogan, gently queries whether such exclusive kinship with another is a feasible or truly advisable romantic goal, given that another's perspective can, like Conor's, unexpectedly change. What happens to the vow to love a specific person "in sickness and in health" if the sickness alters to unrecognisability that specific person?

The quandary has interested filmmakers before – *Regarding Henry* (1991), *Iris* (2001), *Away from Her* (2006) and *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2007) all have their takes on romantic commitment in the aftermath of catastrophic damage – but it is a difficult one to resolve satisfactorily within the conventional parameters of a movie 'arc', in which love and happiness are mutually inclusive. If sustaining the love becomes destructive to the happiness, which is to be maintained?

*Run & Jump* opens with this delicate question – as Vanetia, all optimism, brings Conor back from a long hospital stay to complete his rehabilitation at home – and examines it with genuine curiosity, even if the ensuing narrative throws rather too much melodrama at the wall, from potential romance (with Will Forte's visiting neuroscientist Ted) to familial rifts and bereavement to a suicide attempt by Vanetia and Conor's possibly-gay teenage son. This last incident in particular is skated over and feels as if it's there simply to fulfil a certain indie-movie convention that adults overly caught up in their own woes must be brought back to consciousness by a child placing itself in harm's way.


Vanetia, meanwhile, though warmly embodied by Peake, is a bit of a by-numbers eccentric colleen, from her unruly copper curls to her tendency to dance while dusting; this, as well as the wobble in Peake's Irish accent, makes it a challenge to see her as real. Faced by unbearable complexity, Vanetia escapes into whimsy: darkling bike rides, impetuous outdoor swims, calling her faltering husband "Papa Schnitzel" in reference to a dusty private joke. This tendency of hers permits the film to do the same. The real grimness of the situation is somewhat masked by Vanetia's oh-so-charming bursts of adult play, and by cutesy flashbacks, heavy on the lens flare, to better times with Conor. It's also a little hard to buy that no one has prepared this bright



Happy ever aftermath: Will Forte, Maxine Peake



woman for the extent of Conor's damage, or the impact it might have on their relationship.

The film does hit on some touching insights, however. Conversations between Vanetia and her in-laws ring with awkward authenticity; Peake and Forte have a nice onscreen connection; and the writing is often fine, as when a neat self-correction by son Lenny (Brendan Morris) captures much of what the film is struggling with. "Do you love Dad?" he asks his mother. "New Dad?" 

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Tamara Anglie  
Martina Niland  
**Written by**  
Ailbhe Keogan  
**Co-written by**  
Steph Green  
**Director of Photography**  
Kevin Richey  
**Editor**  
Nathan Nugent  
**Production Designer**  
Stephen Daly  
**Original Music**  
Sebastian Pille  
**Sound Recordist**  
Barry O'Sullivan  
**Costume Designer**  
Kathy Strachan

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Bavaria Pictures  
GmbH, Senator Film  
München GmbH  
**Production Companies**  
Samson Films  
presents  
In co-production  
with Bavaria  
Pictures and Senator  
Film München  
Made in association  
with RTÉ  
Made with the  
support of The

Broadcasting  
Authority of Ireland  
Financially  
supported by  
FilmFernsehFonds  
Bayern FFF  
and Deutscher  
Filmförderfonds  
DFFF  
In association with  
Bord Scannán  
na hÉireann/  
Irish Film Board  
Supported by  
Eurimages  
Developed with  
the assistance  
of Bord Scannán  
na hÉireann/  
Irish Film Board  
Supported by  
Sundance Institute  
Feature Film  
Program with  
additional support  
from Sundance  
Institute/Annenberg  
Feature Film  
Fellowship, Berlinale  
Talent Campus as  
part of the Script  
Station 2010  
In association with  
Cinepostproduction,  
Bavaria Film  
**Executive Producers**  
David Collins

Matthias Esche  
Jan S. Kaiser

### CAST

**Maxine Peake**  
Vanetia Casey  
**Edward MacLiam**  
Conor Casey  
**Sharon Horgan**  
Tara  
**Will Forte**  
Ted Fielding  
**Brendan Morris**  
Lenny  
**Ciara Gallagher**  
Noni  
**Ruth McCabe**  
Nora  
**Michael Harding**  
Paddy  
**Kelby Guilfoyle**  
Fergus  
**Ri Galway**  
Simon  
**Clare Barrett**  
Susan

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Wildcard Distribution  
**9,529 ft +8 frames**

Ireland, present day. After a stroke and ensuing coma, **Conor Casey** returns home to his wife **Vanetia**, small daughter **Noni** and teenage son **Lenny** to continue his rehabilitation. Lodging with the family is American neuroscientist **Ted**, who is studying the process of **Conor's** recovery. **Conor**, a carpenter, begins obsessively carving spherical objects; with his family, he is agitated and irritable, though **Vanetia** clings to the conviction that he will return to his old self. **Lenny** is mocked at school over rumours that he is gay, which **Conor** inadvertently fuels. Initial tension between **Vanetia** and **Ted** gives way to friendship and then flirtation as she finds solace in his company. **Conor's** family observes the increasing intimacy with suspicion. **Conor's** father lectures him about his enduring family responsibilities. **Lenny** begins to steal his father's prescription drugs. **Conor's** father dies; during the wake, his mother interrupts a phone call between **Vanetia** and **Ted** to berate **Vanetia**. Back home, **Conor** talks to **Vanetia** about his father, and the couple make love. Meanwhile, **Ted** gives **Lenny** a lift to a swimming race at his school and, in **Vanetia's** absence, stays to cheer him on. **Lenny** wears swimming trunks embroidered with the word 'GAY'. He wins the race but afterwards takes an overdose and collapses in the changing rooms. **Vanetia** races to the hospital; **Lenny** regains consciousness and apologises to her. **Ted** decides to leave the family but hesitates. He kisses **Vanetia** but she confirms that he should leave. **Vanetia** confirms to **Lenny** that she loves both **Ted** and **Conor**. Before **Ted** leaves, **Lenny**, **Vanetia** and the two men swim outdoors together.


## Sabotage

USA 2013  
Director: David Ayer  
Certificate 15 109m 15s

### Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

Few directors have figured out how to translate Arnold Schwarzenegger's quick wit and likeability to the screen; he often comes off as the pop-culture parody version of himself, a heavily accented brawny mass with brick-like punchline delivery. In *Sabotage* he is relatively elevated as DEA team leader John 'Breacher' Wharton – not because of significant changes to his persona (the cigars are still in place) but because he's surrounded by such a sordid mess.

A team of DEA agents keep \$10 million in drug-raid loot for themselves but are presumably double-crossed by one of their own when the money's stolen before they can divide it; six months later, they're killed off one by one. Co-writer/director David Ayer (a law-enforcement specialist: *Harsh Times*, *Street Kings*, *End of Watch*) renders the agents as one yawping puerile id, shooting lots of bad guys before transitioning to booze-and-strippers time. The deaths won't satisfy gorehounds and are interrupted by long passages of blunt, childish yelling.

Schwarzenegger's adaptability to the new norms of medium-budget action filmmaking is commendable. In his prime, he strode through comparatively lavish productions with glossy 35mm cinematography and blaring orchestral scores; here, in ugly green digital light and during action sequences broken up by debris flying in formless screen-filling blocks, he holds his own, as relatively confident in his line-readings as he's ever been. *Sabotage* is still dull and shrill throughout, neutering the topicality of its drug-war context and the unexpected novelty of an (offscreen) assignation between Arnold and tough-talking American (!) cop Olivia Williams. 

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Bill Block  
David Ayer  
Ethan Smith  
Paul Hanson  
Palak Patel  
**Screenplay**  
Skip Woods  
David Ayer  
**Director of Photography**  
Bruce McCleery  
**Editor**  
Dody Dorn  
**Production Designer**  
Devorah Herbert  
**Original Score**  
David Sardy  
**Sound Designer**  
Piero Mura  
**Costume Designer**  
Mary Clare Hannan

©DEA Productions,  
LLC  
**Production Companies**  
QED International  
presents a QED

International  
production in  
association with  
Crave Films  
A David Ayer film  
**Executive Producers**  
Joe Roth  
Anton Lessine  
Sasha Shapiro  
Albert S. Ruddy  
Skip Woods  
Geoffrey Yim

### Cast

**Arnold Schwarzenegger**  
John 'Breacher' Wharton  
**Sam Worthington**  
Jimmy 'Monster' Morgan  
**Olivia Williams**  
Caroline Brentwood  
**Terrence Howard**  
Sugar  
**Joe Manganiello**  
Grinder  
**Harold Perrineau**

Jackson  
**Martin Donovan**  
Floyd Demel  
**Max Martini**  
Pyro  
**Josh Holloway**  
Neck  
**Mireille Enos**  
Lizzy  
**Kevin Vance**  
Tripod  
**Mark Schlegel**  
Smoke

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Lionsgate UK

**9,832 ft +8 frames**

Atlanta, the present. DEA agent John 'Breacher' Wharton leads his team in stealing \$10 million in drug money, but when they return for the loot it's been taken. Six months later, the members of Breacher's team are killed off one by one. Breacher kills the double-crossing team member, then goes to Mexico with the money, where he kills the cartel members who murdered his wife.


## Silent Sonata

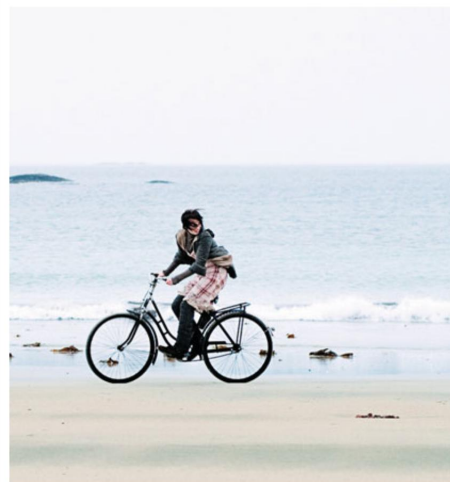
Slovenia/Ireland/Sweden/Finland 2011  
Director: Janez Burger  
Certificate 15 77m 17s

### Reviewed Philip Kemp

Dialogue-free (or almost dialogue-free) films seem to be currently in vogue. There have been various shots at the technique since the end of the silent era, among them Russell Rouse's *The Thief* (1952), Mel Brooks's *Silent Movie* (1976), Singeetham Srinivasa Rao's *Pushpak* (*The Love Chariot*, 1987) and Aki Kaurismäki's *Juha* (1999), but in the past few years they've proliferated: Jerzy Skolimowski's *Essential Killing* (2010) and Michel Hazanavicius's hugely popular *The Artist* (2011) were rapidly followed by *Blancanieves* (2012), Pablo Berger's eerie reworking of the Snow White myth, and J.C. Chandor's old-man-and-the-sea saga *All Is Lost* (2013). Slovenian director Janez Burger's *Silent Sonata* isn't a me-too to this trend; it was originally released in 2010 but has taken until now to reach us.

Unless, like *The Artist*, they explicitly adopt silent-movie conventions, these speech-free zones can feel awkward and contrived, with the audience constantly nagged by thoughts of "But why aren't they talking to each other?" Burger partly avoids this by implying that his circus folk are not only a different nationality from the war-shattered family near whose isolated farmhouse they pitch camp, but are different nationalities from each other. (As indeed they are: Burger has assembled his troupe – genuine circus artistes, all of them – from France, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, Russia, Tajikistan and China. Many are veterans of the Cirque du Soleil.) Even so, there's the occasional jarring "Why don't they...?" moment, but for the most part such concerns are elided by the film's pervading mood of near-surrealist poetry.

Two scenes in particular meld fantasy tantalisingly with reality. At one point the teenage daughter of the family and a young male trick-cyclist go for a bike ride together. Arriving at the beach, they find it strewn with the bodies of soldiers. But rather than react with horror, they find shells, seaweed, flowers and bits of coloured glass and – in a conceit that recalls *Les jeux interdits* (1952) – use them to decorate the decomposing faces. And when a tank shows up, embodiment of faceless destruction, it's co-opted into the oom-pah world of the circus folk and starts turning tricks – an echo here of an episode in Andrzej Munk's 



Rallying the troupers: *Silent Sonata*



↩ *Eroica* (1958). Throughout the film's compact running time Burger plays with images of life and death, treating them as continuities rather than as polar opposites.

Here and there the fantasy seems overdetermined, like the culminating internal rainstorm that sends a deluge flooding through the house, rather too explicitly washing away everything from the past. And the circus as a metaphor for the forces of life is hardly new (Fellini, to look no further). But Burger handles the concept with a limpid directness that makes it fresh, drawing from his speechless cast appealingly unmannered performances. DP Divis Marek's widescreen cinematography finds stark beauty in the scoured landscape (the film was largely shot in Ireland) while lending a warm glow to the exuberant circus sequence. *Silent Sonata* may not be saying anything too original or profound but it conveys its optimistic, life-affirming message with enough charm and brio to make it hard to resist. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producers

Jozko Rutar  
Petra Basin  
Morgan Bushe

#### Written by

Janez Burger

#### Director of Photography

Divis Marek

#### Editor

Milos Kalusek

#### Art Director

Vasja Kokelj

#### Composer

Drago Ivanusa

#### Sound Designers

Robert Flanagan  
Daniel Birch

#### Costume Designer

Alan Hranitelj

#### @Staragara

Production

Companies

Staragara, Fastnet  
Films, The Chimney  
Pot Group, Film i  
Väst together with  
Fortissimo Films  
present a Staragara  
and Fastnet Films  
production

Co-produced by Cine  
Works, TV Slovenija,  
The Chimney  
Pot, Film i Väst

#### CAST

Leon Lucev

father

Paulina Räsänen

beauty

Ravil Sultanov

circus leader

René Bazinet

old man

Daniel Rovai

clown

Marjuta Slamic

dead wife

Luna Zimic Mijovic

daughter

Enej Grom

boy

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Matchbox Films Ltd

6,955ft +8 frames

Slovenian

theatrical title

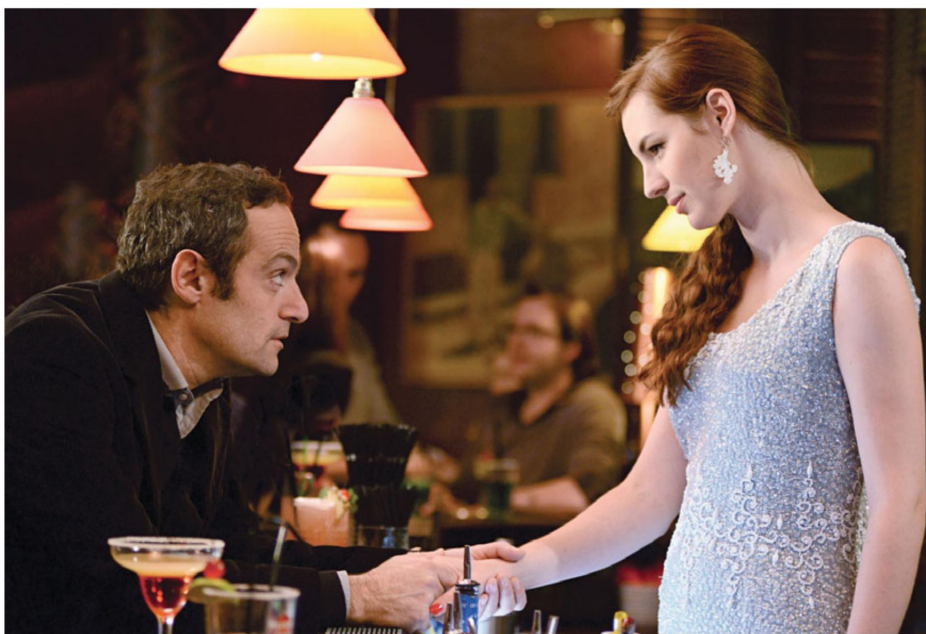
Circus Fantasticus

A war zone, somewhere in present-day Europe. In an isolated farmhouse, a man lays out the corpse of his wife, recently killed. His teenage daughter and young son hover nearby nervously. That night, trucks approach. The farmer levels his shotgun – but the trucks contain a small circus troupe, the Circus Fantasticus. The troupe's aged ringmaster is dying and his colleagues want to mount a final performance for him. They pitch camp beside the farmhouse. The farmer buries his wife. The ringmaster almost sets his trailer alight; he's carried into the house and laid out on the couch previously occupied by the wife's body. The circus performers practise their routines, fascinating the family. A tank appears; the strongman and the fire-eater mount a defiant display. The tank joins in the act but is destroyed by a warplane. The young trick-cyclist and the farmer's daughter take a bike ride together, and the farmer is attracted to the female acrobat. The marquee is erected and the ringmaster is carried out to it. The farmer and his family sit in the audience and the show begins. A clown gives a white rose to the ringmaster, who rejuvenates and directs the show, before handing his baton to the circus's youngest boy and walking out into the night. As the show ends, a storm breaks indoors and out, and water floods through the farmhouse. The next day the farmer and the acrobat stand hand in hand looking at two graves. The circus packs up and leaves, taking the farmer and his children with it.

## Stick Out Your Tongue

France 2013

Director: Axelle Ropert



Stuck on you: Cédric Kahn, Louise Bourgoin

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

*Stick Out Your Tongue* isn't a film of grand gestures and essential dilemmas but rather of incremental moves and incidental details. This is not at all the same thing as being cautious.

The film is Axelle Ropert's second feature after 2009's *The Wolberg Family*. Like François Truffaut, whose *Jules et Jim* (1962) is somewhat inescapably evoked by her film's central *ménage à trois*, Ropert was a film critic with a rather fierce reputation, though as a director she works in the registers of lightness and reticence. Ropert is part of a confederation of filmmaker-collaborators whose camaraderie goes back to their days as contributors to the journal *La lettre du cinéma*. Their number includes Pierre Léon, Jean-Paul

Civeyrac, Jean-Charles Fitoussi, Aurélia Georges and, most prominently, Serge Bozon. Ropert wrote or co-wrote Bozon's features *Mods* (2002), *La France* (2007), and *Tip Top* (2013); he in turn has appeared as an actor in both *The Wolberg Family* and *Stick Out Your Tongue*, which was shot by his sister Céline Bozon, who here as ever sculpts the subtlest gradations of light with care.

Appropriately enough, being the work of someone who has belonged to such a close-knit group, *Stick Out Your Tongue* is about a family practice. Boris and Dimitri Pizarnik are two doctors, childless bachelor brothers a few years past 40 who run an office together, and whose apartments are in easy sight on one another. They are a study in contrasts. Boris is dark-haired

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

David Thion  
Philippe Martin

#### Screenplay/ Dialogue

Axelle Ropert

#### Director of Photography

Céline Bozon

#### Editor

François Quikere

#### Art Director

Sophie Reynaud-Malouf

#### Original Music

Benjamin Esdraffo

#### Sound

Laurent Gabiot

#### Costumes

Delphine Capossela

#### ©LFP - Les Films

Pelléas, Groupe

Hérodias

#### Production Companies

Les Films Pelléas

presents with the

participation of  
Ciné+ and Centre  
National du Cinéma  
et de l'Image Animée  
in association  
with Soficinéma,  
Indéfيلمs, Cinéma  
7 in co-production  
with Hérodias  
Films a Les Films  
Pelléas production  
Developed with the  
support of Cofimage  
Développement,

Cinéimage 5  
Développement

#### CAST

Louise Bourgoin

Judith

Cédric Kahn

Boris

Laurent Stocker

Dimitri

Paula Denis

Alice

Serge Bozon

Charles  
Alexandre Wu

Kay

Jean-Pierre Petit

Max

Camille Cayol

Annabelle

Gilles Gaston

Dreyfus

Mr Perez

In Colour

[1.66:1]

Subtitles

#### Distributor

Swipe Films

French theatrical title

Tirez la langue,

mademoiselle

Paris, present day. Two fortysomething doctor brothers, Boris and Dimitri, run a practice together in a predominantly Chinese neighbourhood. One night they pay a house call to a diabetic little girl, Alice, who is experiencing troubling symptoms and whose mother is not at home. Boris later returns to talk with Alice's single mother Judith and chastises her for leaving her daughter alone. Returning home in the early hours, Boris bumps into Judith, and offers to apologise to her over a bowl of soup. Boris becomes infatuated with her and one evening, visiting her at the bar where she works, he blurts out a confession of love. Shortly afterwards, Dimitri, who spends most of his spare time at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, also has

a chance encounter with Judith and is similarly smitten. Dropping into Judith's work one night, Dimitri learns that Boris's advances have succeeded where his have failed, and this knowledge causes a rift between the brothers. They are reconciled when Judith's ex-husband returns from Italy to reclaim his place in the family, breaking Boris's heart.

Some time passes and Dimitri has relocated to the Mediterranean, where he has begun his own practice, while Boris has stayed in Paris. Visiting a patient and friend in hospital, Boris bumps into Judith, who is there with Alice. After an awkward encounter, Judith walks out on Boris, only to return and confess that she and her ex-husband have separated again. She asks Boris to spend his life with her, and he agrees.



## Tarzan

Germany 2013  
Director: Reinhard Klooss  
Certificate PG 94m 6s

and Dimitri is fair. Boris is tall but stooped and Dimitri is small but upright. Boris speaks with a gruff grumble that makes it sound as though he is shovelling out his words with effort, while Dimitri speaks with a pleasant, light, even tone. They are played by Cédric Kahn and Laurent Stocker – the former is best known as a director, the latter is a *sociétaire* of the Comédie-Française who is best known for his theatre work.

It is a conceit of *Stick Out Your Tongue* that everyone in the neighbourhood knows the Pizarnik brothers and their business. “Are you the gruff one or the shy one?” asks Judith (Louise Bourgoin) when she first meets Boris. “You don’t have girlfriends!” protests one of their patients, a teenager (Alexandre Wu) who wants to get off the prescription epilepsy medicine that’s making it impossible for him to get off. *Stick Out Your Tongue* is set in Paris’s 13th arrondissement, the *quartier chinois* – a montage of the neon signs of the all-night Chinese restaurants accompanies the opening credits of this largely nocturnal movie, along with Tim Hardin’s ‘How Can We Hang on to a Dream’. The courtyards between the HLM-block flats act as something like village squares, where greetings are exchanged and acquaintances are asked after. Rather than being used as forbidding symbols of isolation or urban planning gone awry, in the world of *Stick Out Your Tongue* these are neighbourly places.

The tradition of critic-filmmakers is stronger in France than in perhaps any other country in the world, yet it is a painful but undeniable fact that just as the best record collections don’t always make for the best bands, so too intensively curated personal taste doesn’t always translate to a personal style. This being said, the evident amount of attention paid to individual scenes in *Stick Out Your Tongue* pays dividends. Locations are identified through colour-coded shorthand, and Bourgoin’s signature red outfit is correct right down to her manicure, which gets a couple of its own close-ups. Roptert has a curt, frank way of dropping a punchline or underlining a point with a camera nod or a gutsy cutaway, a knack for nudging the viewer along without seeming haranguing. One scene in which the feuding Pizarniks use a patient and friend (Bozon) as a courier to carry messages between them, familiar as the set-up is, becomes fresh and funny with Roptert’s choice of varied camera moves and precision timing, while another scene with a mad-eyed organ grinder is timed perfectly to the last nanosecond.

*Stick Out Your Tongue* is a winning film but not one that I anticipate carrying around with me for days or weeks on end. All of the attention to detail doesn’t necessarily translate into overall impact: when Judith finally turns on her heels and gives in to Boris, the effect is one of a slight, pleasant relief rather than a cosmic justice being righted. Yet when so many filmmakers will settle for nothing less than trampling a viewer with their genius, there is a great deal to be said for anyone who has the patience and confidence to sit back and try merely to charm. It is quite appropriate that *Stick Out Your Tongue* ends with a casual exchange between two minor characters – for this is a movie content to play the part it’s assigned itself rather than hog the stage. 📺

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

Visually highly finished but narratively clumsy, this stylised animated take on Edgar Rice Burroughs’s hero throws a supernatural energy source and worthy eco-concerns into the classic tale, but to little effect. Director Reinhard Klooss’s good-looking but underwritten *Animals United* (2010) had the same disparity, though it boasted far better voice work. Here Kellan Lutz’s Tarzan only weakly conveys his between-two-species dilemma, while Spencer Locke’s breathy Jane gives an anodyne feel to their teen romance and its (literally) ‘me Tarzan, you Jane’ dialogue.

As the film leaps from one headache-inducing 3D spectacle to another (everything from a prehistoric meteor crash to a waterfall rescue), its relentless stream of jungle stunts and the treetop parkour antics of this buffed ‘Tarzan of the Abs’ suggest a constant fear of losing the attention of its young audience. An authorial narrator even drops in periodically to underline the film’s themes: “More powerful than all the energy in the universe – the love of a woman.” Most curious of all is the animation mismatch between the lush, enjoyably photoreal jungle landscapes and their appealingly lifelike gorillas (movements choreographed by *Greystoke*’s Peter Elliott) and the clunky, almost videogame aesthetic of their human opponents. 📺

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Robert Kulzer  
Reinhard Klooss

#### Screenplay

Reinhard Klooss

#### Screen Story

Reinhard Klooss

#### Based on the

Tarzan stories

#### created by Edgar

Rice Burroughs

#### Virtual Camera

Markus Eckert

#### Editor

Alexander Dittner

#### Production Design

Henning Ahlers

#### Music

David Newman

#### Sound Design

Stefan Busch

#### Chrissi Rebay

Markus Stemler

#### Heiko Müller

#### Animation

Robert Kuczera

#### Benedikt Niemann

Jürgen Richter

#### Nicolai Turna

#### ©Constantin Film

Produktion GmbH

#### Production

#### Companies

Supported by

Deutscher

FilmFörderFonds,

FilmFernsehFonds

Bayern, Filmförde-

rungsanstalt,

Nordmedia

Fonds GmbH, Der

Bundesregierung Für

Kultur und Medien

Constantin Film

present a Constantin

Film production

In association

with Ambient

Entertainment

#### Executive Producer

Martin Moszkowicz

#### VOICE

#### CAST

Kellan Lutz

Tarzan

Spencer Locke

Jane

Anton Zetterholm

teenage Tarzan

Les Bubb

Porter

Jaime Ray Newman

Alice

Mark Deklin

#### Greystoke

Trevor St. John

Clayton

Brian Huskey

Smith

Robert Capron

Derek

Peter Elliott

leader of gorilla

family/ Tarzan’s

ape friend

Lynn Robertson

Bruce

Tarzan’s ‘mother’

Andy Wareham

bad ape

Phil Hill

Tarzan’s ape friend

#### Dolby Digital/

Dolby Atmos

In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Some screenings

presented in 3D

#### Distributor

E1 Films

8,469 ft +0 frames

**Africa, present day. Mountain gorilla Kala saves and raises a small boy whose parents are killed in a helicopter crash while investigating a hidden meteor cave. Years later, the boy, Tarzan, rescues teenage conservationist Jane Porter in the jungle, and they fall in love. Clayton, the evil CEO of Greystoke Energy, tricks Jane into leading his mining force into the jungle, to find and exploit the energy-packed meteor. Tarzan rallies the creatures of the jungle to attack the invaders. The meteor’s supernatural energies cause a mini-quake. Clayton’s helicopter crashes after Tarzan attacks it. Tarzan learns that he is the real heir to Greystoke Energy, and vows to protect both jungle and meteor site.**

## 36

Director: Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit

See interview  
on page 10

### Reviewed by Anton Bitel

As she spends time with art director Oom (Wanlop Rungkamjad), photographing old buildings in Bangkok, Sai (Vajrasthira Koramit)

reveals that before she became a location scout she studied archaeology. The two activities hardly seem unrelated: after all, currently under instructions from her director to find “a place with a past”, Sai is exploring the ruins of a former love motel, opened just after the Vietnam War. “I used to live nearby, I passed it everyday,” she tells Oom, making it clear that this building’s history and her own have for a time overlapped. In response, Oom suggests slyly that he could show her a better love motel later. Here location is regarded as an archive of human associations – past, present and possibly future – where the *genius loci* is more than the mere structure of the building.

Something similar might be said of Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit’s feature debut, whose rigorously maintained structure is made to accommodate all manner of complex human feelings. The film comprises 36 single-take scenes shot from a fixed camera, with the characters occupying the periphery of the frame and only occasionally drifting into the centre, like the accidental subjects of a snapshot, or perhaps ghosts caught on camera haunting an abandoned locale. Shown in sequence, these shots are formally numbered and idiosyncratically captioned, like photographs collated in an album.

Of course in the shifting world of photography, 36 is a number that comes with its own archaeology: for conventionally there are (or were) 36 exposures in a full roll of film for the kind of old-fashioned analogue camera that Oom himself still uses, marking his character out as a dinosaur destined to disappear (which he soon does). In this way, the very title 36 is not just an arbitrary number: by obliquely evoking a vanishing photographic medium, perhaps even the death of film itself, it encodes Thamrongrattanarit’s key themes of ephemerality, change and loss – as does the fact that 36, for all its mimicry of analogue photographic forms, has been shot digitally.


Unlike Oom, Sai employs a modern digicam, with which she daily takes hundreds of shots for her location work and occasionally for her more personal collection. “It’s easy now,” she explains to Oom. “You just keep them on a hard disk.” Yet for all her confidence in the power of this newer format to preserve the past, two years later, when Oom has long since left the picture, Sai realises that the photos stored on her hard drive – including the small number she took of Oom, who did not like to be photographed – have become corrupted and unusable. At about the same time she also discovers that a young girl Oom had photographed at one of the locations has subsequently died, and that the old building where her current director would next like to shoot has been demolished.

So although in its opening scenes 36 seems to be a breezily elliptical portrait of a relationship that develops between the frames, it soon becomes a melancholic film of memory, absence and reinvention. As the increasingly disoriented Sai





attempts to recover a lost past of fleeting moments, piecing it together from restored files, revisited locations and other people's photographic records, she is not just nostalgically pursuing her own place with a past but also finding a new use for it. Just as Oom had secretly stolen a copy of Sai's files for his own use, Sai too will find a way to reappropriate her past attachments for future projects, ultimately proposing that the hotel roof where she once spent happy hours with Oom might work as a replacement for the lost location where her director spent his own childhood.

From these different pasts, 36 weaves a nostalgic fiction of its own, with viewers tasked with digging through this succession of plain images for the romantic narrative buried beneath, always out of shot. The elusiveness of camera-shy Oom emblematises the empty spaces of the past and the half-life of memory, as digital images (whether Sai's photographs or the shots that constitute 36 itself) are exposed as beautifully imperfect documents of human experience. Combining archaeology, photography and psychogeography, Thamrongtattananit's assured experiment offers minimalist surfaces with hidden depths. 

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Nawapol Thamrongtattananit	<b>Companies</b> A Very Sad Pictures production Produced by Pop Pictures	Karn <b>Sirima</b> <b>Aksornsawang</b> Mrs Wilaporn <b>Puangpaka</b> <b>Aksornsawang</b> Gita
<b>Written by</b> Nawapol Thamrongtattananit	<b>CAST</b>	<b>In Colour</b> Subtitles
<b>Cinematography</b> Pairach Khumwan	<b>Korarnit Vajrasthira</b> Sai	<b>Distributor</b> Day For Night
<b>Editing</b> Chonlasit Upanigkit	<b>Wanlop</b>	
<b>Production Design</b> Rasiqueet Sookkarn	<b>Rungkumjad</b> Oom	
<b>Music</b> Wuttipong Leetrakul	<b>Nottapon</b> <b>Boonprakob</b> Kai	
<b>Sound Design</b> Akritchalerm Kalayanamitr	<b>Siriporn Kongma</b> Jham	
<b>Production</b>	<b>Sivaraj Kongsakul</b>	

Bangkok, Thailand, 2008. Location scout Sai and art director Oom form a bond while visiting places 'with a past' for a small production. Oom gently mocks Sai's habit of photographing everything rather than looking with her own eyes, as well as her preference for digital media.

Two years later, Sai's director Karn shows her a photograph of an old clinic from his childhood, hoping to tap into its nostalgic resonance for his latest shoot. Finding that the building has been demolished, Sai discovers, while searching for a suitable replacement, that her hard drive of photographs from 2008 has been damaged. On the advice of her best friend Jham, Sai turns to old school friend Kai, now an IT specialist, to restore the lost digital files. Revisiting several locations from that time, Sai learns that a landlady's young daughter, whom Oom photographed, has since died. Sai recovers two photographs (of herself) from 2008 with the help of an ex-boyfriend, copies some more from Jham's collection, and after some months picks up her fully restored drive from Kai. However, the small set of photographs she took of Oom, or that he took with her camera, turns out to be permanently corrupted.

Meanwhile, far away, Oom uses as a screensaver the one existing digital photograph of Sai and Oom together. Returning to the rooftop where that picture was taken, Sai calls Karn to tell him that she thinks she has found the right location for his film.

## A Thousand Times Good Night

Norway/Ireland/Sweden/Germany 2013

Director: Erik Poppe

Certificate 15 117m 29s

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

*A Thousand Times Good Night* is less a screen drama than two hours of guilty liberal handwringing, a highlight reel of Juliette Binoche practising her vacant wistful gaze. She plays Rebecca, a photojournalist who leaves behind a peaceful family life in Ireland to cover the conflict in Afghanistan.

The opening credits announce the film as an EU co-production whose investors include the Norwegian Film Institute, the Irish Film Board and Eurimages. The Scandinavians are spoken for by Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, one of the strapping *Game of Thrones* cast, here in gentle-giant mode, modelling several handsome woollen sweaters in the role of Rebecca's long-suffering husband Marcus. As for Ireland, we get the couple's improbable colleen daughters (Laurn Canny is in the meatier role of Steph), several nice tourist-board views – verdant hillsides and coastal scenery as Binoche jogs on the beach – a supporting role for U2 drummer Larry Mullen Jr and nary a mention of the Troubles, for, of course, sectarian violence is something that occurs far away in the land of the Brown People.

This is the fourth feature for Norwegian director Erik Poppe, who has previously worked as a cinematographer and, in the 1980s, as a war photographer. It's an old saw that flipping the expected gender of a character can add new and unexpected elements to otherwise familiar material, but this is nullified as Poppe lards every minute of *A Thousand Times Good Night*'s runtime with at least a thousand visual and aural clichés. We've got hands waving out of the window of a moving car and caressing white linens flapping in slow motion on the laundry line, all to the tune of

### Coster-Waldau, Binoche



### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Finn Gjerdrum Stein B. Kvæe	<b>by/Keyboards/ Percussions</b> Armand Amar	Newgrange Pictures and Film i Väst	MEDIA Programme of the EU	<b>CAST</b>	Lisa <b>Chloe Annett</b>
<b>Script</b> Harald Rosenløw Eeg	<b>Sound Design</b> Hugo Ekornes	With the participation of Norwegian Film Institute, Irish Film Board/Bord Scannán ha hÉireann, Swedish Film Institute, Nordisk Film & TV Fond,	Supported by Eurimages	<b>Juliette Binoche</b>	Jessica <b>Bush Moukartzel</b>
<b>Story</b> Erik Poppe	<b>Costume Design</b> Judith Williams		In co-operation with NRK, SVT, Global Screen, Euforia	<b>Nikolaj Coster- Waldau</b>	Brian
<b>Director of Photography</b> John Christian Rosenlund	<b>Production Companies</b> Paradox presents in co-production with Zentropa International Sweden,	MEDIA Programme of the European Union, Eurimages and financed by Eikeland & Haug, Storyline Studios A film by Erik Poppe With the development and support of the	Directed with the support of Norwegian Artistic Research Programme	Marcus <b>Maria Doyle Kennedy</b>	<b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1] Subtitles
<b>Edited by</b> Sofia Lindgren			<b>Executive Producers</b> Peter Garde Erik Poppe	Theresa <b>Larry Mullen Jr</b>	<b>Distributor</b> Arrow Films
<b>Production Design</b> Eleanor Wood			Finn Gjerdrum Stein B. Kvæe	<b>Mads Ousdal</b>	<b>10,573 ft +8 frames</b>
<b>Musical Score</b> <b>Written and Directed</b>			Geir Eikeland Stig Haug	Stig <b>Laurn Canny</b>	Swedish title Tusen ganger god natt
				Stephanie, Steph <b>Adrianna Cramer</b>	
				Curtis	

Afghanistan, present day. While documenting a female suicide bomber's final hours, photojournalist Rebecca is seriously injured in a marketplace blast. Rebecca's husband Marcus joins her in the hospital and together they return home to their two daughters, teenager Steph and younger Lisa, in peaceful rural Ireland. Marcus says that he can no longer live with Rebecca if she continues to cover dangerous global conflict, so she vows to quit her job. When Steph begins work on an African project for school, however, Rebecca takes the opportunity to photograph an allegedly safe refugee camp in Kenya, taking Steph along with her with Marcus's blessing.


Shortly after Rebecca and Steph arrive at the camp,

spare, quavering piano plunking, the soundtrack of sober soul-searching and final, stiff-upper-lip determination. Uninspired compositions are lent a semblance of vitality by handheld tremor, while Poppe relies heavily on the eloquence of Binoche's close-up to carry his story – overmuch, in fact. There are acres of footage showing the actress with eyes set towards an uncertain future, the new furrows on her face undisguised in plain daylight, as in last year's *Camille Claudel 1915*.

What's meant to register here is Binoche's lack of vanity, her bravery – though this becomes confused in *A Thousand Times Good Night*'s all-consuming welter of smug self-congratulation. Rebecca is brought to the brink of confronting questions about the ethics of her work, the reduction of subjects to objects, but she's invariably absolved once the film retreats to its standard mode of chiding didacticism.

"The world was more interested in Paris Hilton climbing out of the car with no knickers on than what was happening in the world," Rebecca tells her daughter, explaining why she shoots – and it says something that the film repeatedly places its audience in the position of a child being lectured about societal ills. (Marcus also gets his chance to hold forth; he's a marine biologist working to raise awareness of radioactive pollution in the Irish Sea.)

Adding to the air of pedantry is the fact that the script, by Poppe and Harald Rosenløw-Eeg, pops every single theme squarely on the nose: the identifiable nadir has younger daughter Lisa, who has begged for a pet cat, being told to choose

between two, one named Happy and the other Lucky – you can't have it all, you see! This wisdom is attested to by *A Thousand Times Good Night*, which tries for both moral ambivalence and courageous affirmation and ends up with nothing much at all. 

soldiers from another tribe attack. Reverting to old habits, Rebecca leaves Steph in the safekeeping of others and heads towards the action with her camera. Marcus learns of this and throws Rebecca out of the house. Rebecca prepares to travel to Kabul to shoot a follow-up to her earlier assignment. Rather than board the plane, however, she goes to watch Steph present her African project to her class.

Still unreconciled with Marcus, Rebecca returns to Kabul to photograph the preparation of another suicide bomber, this one a girl no older than Steph. The girl goes towards her death and Rebecca sinks to her knees in exhausted despair.



# A Touch of Sin

People's Republic of China/Japan 2013  
Director: Jia Zhang-ke  
Certificate 15 129m 45s

See Feature  
on page 30

## Reviewed by Andrew Tracy

Much of the commentary on *A Touch of Sin* has focused, quite understandably, on the seemingly dramatic shift it signals in Jia Zhangke's cinema, the undertone of social criticism coursing through the meditative elegies of *Platform* (2000), *Still Life* (2006) and *I Wish I Knew* (2010) here rendered as a strikingly overtoneal symphony of anger and disgust. Undoubtedly, *Sin* is unique in Jia's body of work in that it is organised thematically, narratively and formally around acts of violence; but ultimately it is the continuities rather than the ruptures with his previous work that are the most crucial.

To begin with the ruptures, in *Sin* Jia is most certainly tapping into the current and ongoing genrefication of art/festival cinema (cf. the maladroït collected works of Park Chanwook and Nicolas Winding Refn, Brilante Mendoza's *Sapi*, Claire Denis's *Bastards*, Olivier Assayas's *Boarding Gate* etc). Robert Koehler in *Cinema Scope* has perceptively pointed out the sardonic, almost self-mocking way in which Jia introduces his genre-movie tropes in the film's opening sequence, not only fetishising the implacable spaghetti-western cool of Wang Baoqiang's motorbiking bandit and Jiang Wu's duster-sporting rebel-with-a-cause but quite literally beginning with a bang, as a fireball announces the title (with its winkingly obvious reference to King Hu's wuxia masterpiece *A Touch of Zen*).

Having thus frontloaded his generic touchstones, however, Jia spends much of the rest of the film undercutting them even as he quite brilliantly deploys them. Where the enclosed cinephilic universe of a Tarantino shuts itself off from the world while ludicrously claiming to comment on it, Jia's no less artificial (im)morality play – in which four protagonists react with violence to their variously oppressed situations – sets itself down squarely within a doggedly depressing reality. Tarantino's boringly baroque sequences of carnage occur because they 'have' to; fetishising genre rather than putting it to some truly conscious end, he invests violence with a meaning unto itself. In *Sin*, the fatalistic progression towards each differently preordained act of killing – and the determined *placement* of these actions within a vividly sketched social-political-cultural milieu – saps them of thrill, even as each is rendered with sometimes striking stylistic bravado (particularly the unforgettable sequence where Zhao Tao's abused bathhouse attendant is suddenly transfigured into a ferocious wuxia warrior). Tarantino and his fawning critics aggrandise comic-book style and comic-book-style morality into an impoverished, hypocritical conception of 'art'; Jia artfully uses moments of comic-book amplification to heighten real-world ills, real-world injustices and the sometimes explosive but finally impotent rage of people trapped within a real world made distorted and grotesque by the predations of the powerful.

On a formal level, then, *A Touch of Sin* is a more pronounced iteration of Jia's overarching aesthetic project. In *Platform*, Jia built on the lessons bequeathed by Hou Hsiao-hsien



Lady vengeance: Zhao Tao

by demonstrating how one could turn the ontological promise of the Hou-style long take – uninterrupted duration as guarantee of a sovereign reality – into a heightened formalist endeavour; in all his films since then, he has explored the many ways in which documentary reality and sometimes blatant artifice can fuse, and how the latter can contribute to or help illuminate the former. And just as *Platform* used an itinerant group of performers as a bellwether of the transition to a post-communist China, Jia has kept theatricality front and centre throughout his subsequent films, from the elaborately costumed theme-park performers in *The World* (2004), to the transparent use of well-known actors amid the parade of real-life subjects in *24 City* (2008), to the traditional theatre troupe whose closing, direct-to-camera address puts an appropriately explicit period to *A Touch of Sin*'s blunt, wholly unambiguous broadside.

It's that quality of directness, of purpose – here particularly fierce purpose – that gives Jia's plays with fiction and non-fiction both their vigour and their political perceptiveness and bite. The spectacularised, individual violence

of Jia's 'sinners' is symptom of and reaction to the quieter but far more massive violence of the state-capitalist behemoth that has made the insanely unreal and unjust reality within which the protagonists exist. With power comes an increased range of imagination, or rather an increased ability to realise one's imaginings. What else (apart from a tragedy) is the wholesale uprooting of populations and the erasure of communities effected by the Three Gorges Dam (as portrayed by Jia in *Still Life*) but the erection of a monumental imagined reality upon the ruins of innumerable smaller-scale realities? What else (apart from repulsive) is the theme-park brothel in the concluding panel of *A Touch of Sin*'s quadriptych than an exploitative version of *The World*'s globe-spanning simulacrum, the predatory privileges of wealth adding carnal pleasure to vicarious tourism? If Jia elicits some cathartic satisfaction by transmuting real-life crimes into florid cinematic revenge fantasies, he is quick to show how ultimately useless and fleeting such liberating fantasies are in the face of a far more capacious, powerful and pernicious unreality. ☹

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Ichijima Shozo  
**Screenwriter**  
Jia Zhangke  
**Director of Photography**  
Yu Lik Wai  
**Editors**  
Matthieu Laclau  
Lin Xudong  
**Art Director**  
Liu Weixin

**Music Composer**  
Lim Giong  
**Sound Designer**  
Zhang Yang  
**Stylist**  
Wang Tao  
  
@Xstream Pictures  
(Beijing)  
**Production Companies**  
Xstream Pictures

(Beijing), Office  
Kitano, Shanghai Film  
Group Corporation  
present in association  
with Bandai Visual,  
Bitters End, Shanxi  
Film Group  
A film by Jia Zhangke  
**Executive Producers**  
Jia Zhangke  
Mori Masayuki  
Ren Zhonglun

**Film Extracts**  
*Exiled/Fang zhu* (2006)  
*Green Snake/Ching Se* (1993)

### CAST

**Jiang Wu**  
Dahai  
**Wang Baoqiang**  
Zhou San

**Zhao Tao**  
Xiao Wu  
**Luo Lanshan**  
Xiao Hui  
**Zhang Jiayi**  
teenager sending  
money home  
**Li Meng**  
prostitute  
  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

### Subtitles

**Distributor**  
Arrow Film  
Distributors Ltd  
**11,677 ft +8 frames**  
  
Chinese  
theatrical title  
**Tian Zhu Ding**

In a mining town in the northern province of Shanxi, local rabble-rouser Dahai protests against the corrupt officials who have enriched themselves from the privatisation of the town's formerly state-run mine. After being beaten by the local robber baron's men, he arms himself with a rifle and murders several people, including the town mayor and a man seen viciously beating a horse.

In Chongqing, itinerant worker Zhou San returns home for his mother's 70th birthday. The next day, in a busy commercial street, he stalks, robs and murders a wealthy couple who have just left a bank after making a large withdrawal.

In Hubei province, Xiao Wu works as a receptionist at a sauna. After suffering a beating at the hands

of her married lover's wife and in-laws, she is assaulted in the sauna by a wealthy patron, whom she impulsively kills with a single slash of a knife.

In Dongguan, former factory worker Xiao Hui finds a job as a waiter in a high-class brothel, where he falls in love with one of the sex workers. Increasingly depressed at seeing her abasement at the hands of wealthy clients, he kills himself by jumping off the balcony of a cramped workers' tenement.

Released from prison, Xiao Wu moves to Shanxi, where she applies for a job at the company of the crooked entrepreneur murdered by Dahai. In the town square, she watches a performance by a traditional theatre troupe, whose narrator recites insistently: "Do you know your sin?"



## The Two Faces of January

France/United Kingdom/USA/Luxembourg 2013

Director: Hossein Amini

Certificate 12A 96m 28s

See  
Industry,  
page 14

### Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

*The Two Faces of January* reworks many themes from Patricia Highsmith's better-known novel of a decade earlier, *The Talented Mr Ripley*, and Hossein Amini's adaptation of the former similarly echoes the two film adaptations of the latter – in fact, Anthony Minghella, director of *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1999), is thanked prominently in the credits. But *Two Faces* also aspires to the classic style of *Plein soleil*, René Clément's 1960 Ripley adaptation. With a stately pace dependent on melodramatic direction, *Two Faces* – like its string-heavy score by Alberto Iglesias – attempts homage but verges on period-piece pastiche. Along with the score, laborious crosscutting at moments of high drama signals the outcome but deflates any tension.

Amini's choice of project for his first film behind the camera sits uneasily somewhere between one of his early screenplays, an adaptation of Henry James's *The Wings of a Dove* (1997), and one of his most recent, *Drive* (2011). Like the former it is a psychological study of Americans abroad caught in sexual and financial paranoia, but it also builds its thrills on moments of up-close violence, albeit with a worshipful imitation of *Brylcreemed*, Zippo-flicking machismo rather than the postmodern variant brought blankly to the screen by Ryan Gosling. Viggo Mortensen reprises his role in *History of Violence* (2005) via Chester, an apparently charming everyman harbouring a criminal past, while Oscar Isaac, clearly the face of 1962, follows Llewyn Davis with Rydal, another – in Chester's words – "callow youth". Isaac is convincingly puppyish as the bohemian young poet Rydal appears to be, but, like Michael Fassbender in *A Dangerous Method* (2011), cannot match Mortensen's intensity.

As ever in Highsmith, no one is innocent: Rydal is – as Chester notes – on the make, squiring wealthy American student Lauren around Athens; and Chester's wife Colette knows the details of his investment scam but goes on the run with him regardless. When the film briefly cedes point of view to her, Kirsten Dunst gives Colette a tender confusion and disappointment



Viggo Mortensen, Oscar Isaac, Kirsten Dunst

that shade the character away from shrewish golddigger and raise intriguing questions about complicity and consent. But in the scenes played from Chester's or Rydal's POV, which dominate, Colette is pettish and irrational, allowing the film to kill her off without compunction, her violent death grotesquely presented as either her own fault or little more than a twist in the competition between the two equally unpleasant men.

Highsmith's cool, critical appraisal of how money makes criminals of everyone is missing here, as is the mapping of the homoeroticism of Rydal and Chester's relationship and the suggestion that repression of desire plays a role in their avarice and betrayal. Rydal and Chester catch each other's eye, follow each other, share complicity in dragging a male body from Chester's bathroom, wrestle, mirror each other – but the film seems unable to think about the distorted erotic that, as so often in Highsmith's work, controls these characters. In place of her incisive intelligence is a psychologically confused narrative that plays, at best, like a Greek island photoshoot homage to 60s fashion. Luxe costumes and locations cosset the A-list stars, the complicit richness of the picture untroubled by the essay on dirty money that the source text assays. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producers

Tom Sternberg  
Tim Bevan  
Eric Fellner  
Robyn Slovic  
**Written by**  
Hossein Amini  
Based on the novel by  
Patricia Highsmith  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Marcel Zyskind  
**Editors**  
Nicolas Chauderge  
Jon Harris  
**Production Designer**  
Michael Carlin  
**Music by/Score**  
Conducted and  
Produced by  
Alberto Iglesias  
**Production**  
**Sound Mixer**  
Ray Beckett  
**Costume Designer**

Steven Noble

@StudioCanal S.A.

#### Production Companies

StudioCanal presents  
in association  
with Antoin Capital  
Entertainment with  
the participation of  
Lovefilm a Working  
Title production  
A Timnick/Mirage  
production  
Made with the  
support of the  
BFI's Film Fund  
**Executive Producers**  
Amelia Granger  
Liza Chasin  
Olivier Courson  
Ron Halpern  
Max Minghella  
Timothy Bricknell

#### CAST

**Viggo Mortensen**  
Chester MacFarland  
**Kirsten Dunst**  
Colette MacFarland  
**Oscar Isaac**  
Rydal Keener  
**Daisy Bevan**  
Lauren

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
**Part-subtitled**

**Distributor**  
Studiocanal Limited

8,682ft +0 frames

Athens, 1962. Visiting the Parthenon, American tourists Chester and Colette MacFarland meet fellow American Rydal Keener, the son of an archaeologist, who is acting as a tour guide to heiress Lauren. When Rydal returns Colette's bracelet after dining with them, he finds himself helping to move the body of a man Chester has killed – an American private investigator who has pursued Chester to Athens to recover money for clients who invested with him. Rydal helps the couple flee to Crete to secure fake passports. Details of Chester's lucrative con slowly emerge, as does his increasing paranoia when reports of the PI's murder appear in newspapers and Colette and Rydal appear to form a bond. Chester is forced into confessing the murder to Colette, who panics. Sheltering by night in the ruins of Knossos, Chester attempts to lose Rydal but ends up killing Colette. Framed for the murder, Rydal follows Chester back to Athens and then to Istanbul. Now informing for the FBI, Rydal sets up a meeting with Chester, who attempts to implicate him before fleeing. Shot, Chester exonerates Rydal in his dying confession.

## Willow Creek

USA 2013

Director: Bobcat Goldthwait

Certificate 15 79m 32s

### Reviewed by Sophie Ivan

'Why?' is a question often prompted by banal horror movies. Why don't the protagonists make a swift U-turn when they're harassed by locals? Why don't they stop filming themselves and run for their lives? Such questions are raised by *Willow Creek*, the latest entry in the overstuffed found-footage canon, which focuses its amateur lens on the all-American 'Bigfoot' or 'sasquatch' legend. Most pressing of all: why did Bobcat Goldthwait decide to make it?

A cult comic whose incendiary reputation was literally confirmed when he torched Jay Leno's sofa on *The Tonight Show* in 1994, Goldthwait then made several edgy black comedies, notably *World's Greatest Dad* (2009), with Robin Williams as a single father who exploits his teenage son's death. Those who felt the follow-up, media satire *God Bless America* (2011), lacked bite, will likely find *Willow Creek* toothless.

Presented as a documentary/found-footage hybrid, it centres on borderline-obnoxious hipsters Jim and Kelly, who arrive in California's Willow Creek to investigate Bigfoot sightings. Over a third of the film is devoted to interviewing townsfolk and local folklore and cashings-in. The scares, when they finally come, arrive in entirely predictable fashion, via unwelcoming locals and woeful orienteering skills.

Goldthwait has jokingly referred to *Willow Creek* as 'The Blair Squatch Project', and it's just as well he has a sense of humour about it. *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) not only trumps *Willow Creek* for originality but also for filmmaking and performances. (Eduardo Sánchez, co-director of the former, is now in production on his own Bigfoot movie, *Exists*). Where you could almost feel the snot and tears running down Heather Donahue's face in *Blair Witch*, here Goldthwait regular Alexie Gilmore's mascara barely runs, and the overwhelming takeaway from her expressions of open-mouthed horror is admiration for her dentist's handiwork. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Sarah de Sa Rego  
Aimee Pierson  
**Written by**  
Bobcat Goldthwait  
**Cinematographer**  
Evan Phelan  
**Editors**  
Stephen Thurston  
Jason Stewart  
**Sound**  
Frank Montes  
**Costume Designer**  
Sarah de Sa Rego

A Jerkschool  
production

#### CAST

**Alex Gilmore**  
Kelly  
**Bryce Johnson**  
Jim  
**Laura Montagna**  
missing woman  
**Bucky Sinister**  
angry man at road  
**Timmy Red**  
ukulele singer  
**Steven Streufert**  
**Shaun L. White**  
Guy Sr  
**Nita Rowley**

**Tom Yamarone**  
themselves  
**Ranger Troy**  
**Andrews**  
Peter Jason

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]

**Distributor**  
Kaleidoscope  
Entertainment

Present-day California. Aiming to make a documentary about the 'Bigfoot' legend, Jim and girlfriend Kelly head for Bluff Creek, where there have been sightings in the past. After setting up camp for the night, they are woken by strange noises. Next day they set off home but realise that they have been walking in circles. They seem to be pursued. Jim's camera is overturned by an unseen predator. We hear Jim apparently being mauled to death, followed by Kelly's screams.



# The Wind Rises

Director: Miyazaki Hayao  
Certificate PG 126m 35s

See Feature  
on page 20

## Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

The Japanese animation director Miyazaki Hayao, best known for his 2001 fantasy *Spirited Away*, says that *The Wind Rises* will be his last film.

While it's very unlike *Spirited Away* in most respects, it's similarly fascinating and baffling, with wild narrative lurches and seeming non sequiturs. It's Miyazaki's most atypical cartoon, yet it might be his most personal self-representation, a portrait of the artist as a myopic dreamer. The chief character is a historical figure, Horikoshi Jiro, the aircraft engineer who designed the Zero fighter plane used at Pearl Harbor, though his story is heavily fictionalised.

At first, there's no warning of how unusual the film will be. Presented in Miyazaki's lush hand-drawn style, it opens with a bespectacled young boy climbing on to the roof of his house. He takes off in a tiny, sparrow-like plane over an old-world Japanese landscape. It could be the start of one of the filmic dream-trips for which Miyazaki is famous. Instead, just after some fabulous monsters appear, the boy wakes up. Soon after, the same character, now a young man, is caught up in the Great Kanto earthquake of 1923, Japan's worst natural disaster of the past 100 years. The scale is epic. There are massed crowds, Tokyo in flames and terrifying exhalations from the earth. There are also more dreams, theme parks of the imagination, as Jiro climbs around gigantic planes in flight, led by his Italian idol Giovanni Caproni, a moustached Michelangelo of aircraft design.

But much of the film takes place in a most unexpected territory for a Studio Ghibli film: that of grown-up work. In many scenes we see Jiro sitting in an office, at an artist's desk, like those Miyazaki has sat at over his long career. It's as if he's declaring the holidays over. True, the animation does a sterling job of enlivening Jiro's labours – the character's alert intensity belies his colourless politeness, and we see the beautiful flying machines riding winds in his mind. The script is deft in sketching the worldly issues Jiro chooses not to dwell on, such as why Japan is developing hugely expensive military hardware while the people go hungry.

But Jiro's successive projects and failings have little momentum; taken together, these scenes become boring. A populist filmmaker of three decades' standing, Miyazaki may know this without caring. As (ostensibly) his last film, *The Wind Rises* feels like a statement of how Miyazaki has lived, an artist like Jiro, trying to articulate dreams in an industrial environment. Some scenes towards the end of the film feel especially autobiographical – for example when Jiro is hustled between shouting clients (but doesn't listen to what they say) and excites his awed young workers with his vision for what they can accomplish, like a director holding forth in his studio. If Caproni is Jiro's dream self, Jiro is Miyazaki's.

In the second half, the populist Miyazaki returns, offering a wholly fictional love story. Jiro meets a woman, Naoko, who's the girl he helped during the earthquake, though she's really lifted from the tragic fiction of novelist Hori Tatsuo. Many reviewers have found the ailing Naoko



Wing nut: *The Wind Rises*

wisply sentimental, a betrayal of Miyazaki's more active heroines in earlier films. Yet her story is charmingly presented, never more than when Jiro courts her with paper aeroplanes, which he launches towards her balcony. This scene accords with an old ideal of animation, being told entirely through images and music. Despite the couple's formality, their drawings convey passion. The film even gently confirms that, despite Naoko's frailty, the lovers consummate their marriage on their wedding night.

Afterwards, Jiro tries to reconcile his two rival passions, his art and his wife. One scene shows him working at home and holding Naoko's hand as she falls asleep next to him. It's a moment that is at once tenderly underplayed and melodramatically overstated. More melodrama is provided by the animated weather, with Jiro and Naoko caught up in a torrential storm before seeing a rainbow. Naoko reacts: "Life is wonderful, isn't it?" It might be Miyazaki's response to the most famous line in the Japanese classic *Tokyo Story* (1953) – "Isn't life disappointing?" – though he's not necessarily contradicting it.

The film shows the terrible destruction

wrought by Jiro's planes, but only glancingly. Caproni says he prefers a world with pyramids to one without – is this an aesthete's dismissal of the human suffering that pyramids and planes entail? For viewers paying attention, the script refers to the German engineer Hugo Junkers and his principled opposition to the Nazis, in implicit contrast to Jiro's indifference. But the film judges Jiro for his failings as a husband far more than it criticises his political passivity.

At the film's arresting climax, Jiro attends his crowning professional (and military) triumph and is horrified when he realises that something terrible has happened and that he has been oblivious. We cut to Japan in flames again, all Jiro's aircraft destroyed. Yet the whole film builds up Jiro as an admirable, romantic figure, separated from the military machine, which is depicted as impersonal and threatening. This is no defence of Japan's wartime conduct. The muddier issue is whether a 21st-century Japanese film about Horikoshi has any duty to condemn crimes facilitated by his inventions. *The Wind Rises* does not; instead, it abstracts and fantasises Jiro the artist and his lovely dreams of flight. 🍷

## Credits and Synopsis

### Producer

Suzuki Toshio  
**Original Story/Screenplay**  
Miyazaki Hayao  
Based on his manga *Kaze tachinu*, loosely based on the story by Hori Tatsuo  
**Editing**  
Seyama Takeshi  
**Production Designer**  
Kasamatsu Koji  
**Music**  
Joe Hisaishi  
**Sound Designer/Sound Re-recording Mixer**

Kasamatsu Koji  
**Supervising Animator**  
Kosaka Kitaro

**Production Companies**  
Studio Ghibli,  
Nippon Television  
Network, Dentsu  
Hakuhodo DYP,  
Walt Disney Japan,  
Mitsubishi, Toho and  
KDDI present a film  
by Hayao Miyazaki

### VOICE CAST

*Japanese-language version*  
**Anno Hideaki**  
Horikoshi Jiro  
**Takimoto Miori**  
Satomi Naoko  
**Nishijima Hidetoshi**  
Honjo  
**Nishimura Masahiko**  
Kurokawa  
**Stephen Alpert**  
Castorp  
**Kazama Morio**  
Satomi  
**Takeshita Keiko**  
Jiro's mother

**Shida Mirai**  
Kurokawa  
**Kunimura Jun**  
Hattori  
**Otake Shinobu**  
Kurokawa's wife  
**Nomura Mansai**  
Giovanni Caproni

*English-language version*  
**Joseph Gordon-Levitt**  
Horikoshi Jiro  
**John Krasinski**  
Honjo  
**Emily Blunt**  
Satomi Naoko

**Martin Short**  
Kurokawa  
**Stanley Tucci**  
Giovanni Caproni  
**Mandy Patinkin**  
Hattori  
**Mae Whitman**  
Horikoshi Kayo  
**Werner Herzog**  
Castorp  
**Jennifer Grey**  
Kurokawa's wife  
**William H. Macy**  
Satomi

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
Released in English-

language version  
and Japanese-  
language version  
subtitled in English

**Distributor**  
Studiocanal Limited

**11,392ft +8 frames**  
  
English-language  
version  
**126m 36s**  
**11,394ft +0 frames**

Japanese  
theatrical title  
**Kaze tachinu**

The film relates the story of Japanese aeroplane engineer Horikoshi Jiro, born in 1903. As a boy, Jiro dreams of planes. In 1923, he's caught up in the Great Kanto earthquake in Tokyo, where he helps a young girl to safety. Later he becomes a plane designer working for Mitsubishi in Nagoya, where he tries to create new warplanes, though his efforts are frustrated. Holidaying at a summer resort, Jiro encounters a young woman, Naoko, who reveals that

she was the girl he helped in 1923. They grow close and become engaged but Naoko has tuberculosis and her condition worsens. She comes to Nagoya, where she and Jiro are privately married. They enjoy a brief period of happiness together. However, while Jiro is away testing a triumphantly successful design – the precursor to the Zero fighter plane – Naoko leaves Nagoya quietly, knowing that she is dying and wanting Jiro to remember her as she was.



# Home cinema



Bomber jacket: David Keith as Paul White, the serial-killing protagonist of Donald Cammell's *White of the Eye*

## PERFORMANCE ENHANCED

Donald Cammell left behind the louche underworlds of London to channel his delirious visions into genre pictures for US studios

### WHITE OF THE EYE

UK 1987; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 18; 111 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: audio commentary by Donald Cammell biographer Sam Umland, 'Donald Cammell: The Ultimate Performance' (1998 documentary), 'The Argument' (1972 short film by Cammell), deleted scenes, flashback scenes as originally shot, original theatrical trailer, alternate credits sequence, booklet featuring new writing by Brad Stevens and Sam Umland and previously unpublished extract from the memoirs of producer Elliott Kastner

#### Reviewed by Kim Newman

Donald Cammell managed to direct one feature film for each of the four decades in which he was active as a filmmaker. While he was alive, *Performance* (1968), his debut, tended to be regarded as the work of its much busier co-director Nicolas Roeg, so he seldom benefited from that movie's lasting cult reputation. Since Cammell's suicide in 1996, views about the authorship of *Performance*

have shifted – to such a degree that it's probably time critics and historians spoke up to value Roeg's undoubted contribution.

A cultured, louche Briton, Cammell was attuned to the London underworlds explored in *Performance* but he relocated to an alien America in 1970, and was intermittently allowed to channel his vision into studio-backed genre pieces: the science-fiction film *Demon Seed* (1977), the serial-killer drama *White of the Eye* (1987), the erotic thriller *Wild Side* (1995). None was a commercial success or attracted much critical attention at the time, and all were difficult productions. *White of the Eye* seems to have suffered less at the hands of Cannon than *Demon Seed* had from MGM or *Wild Side* from Nu Image.

It has to be said that Cammell spent his entire career flirting with self-destruction and seems to have gone out of his way to make things difficult for himself. If he really wanted to get away from being compared with Nic Roeg, why did he cast Julie Christie as a woman whose marriage chills after the death of her daughter in *Demon Seed*? One of the many myths about his suicide is that he shot himself because *Wild Side* was re-edited against his wishes (a posthumous rerelease at least partially restored his version). All his films flirt with autobiography, as much

because he tried to live out their scenarios after making them as because he layered elements of his own life into their fabric.

Cammell's many other adventures (some touched on in the useful Kevin Macdonald-Chris Rodley documentary *Donald Cammell: The Ultimate Performance*, which is among the extras here) included playing Osiris for Kenneth Anger in *Lucifer Rising* (1972), directing pop videos for U2 (a band the opera- and country-&-western-loving murderer in *White of the Eye* sneers at), playing a bit-part in Eric Rohmer's *La Collectionneuse* (1967), scripting the Brooke Shields vehicle *Tilt* (1979) and writing a novel published as a collaboration with Marlon Brando (for whom he developed several projects that didn't happen).

*The Argument*, a hallucinatory short film shot in 1972 but not edited until after Cammell's death, hints at another kind of cinema to which Cammell wasn't prepared to commit. One of nature's underground artists, he still sought studio backing (even *Performance* was made for Warner Bros) and tried to feed his vision into conventional narratives rather than seek out more congenial angels.

*White of the Eye* is Cammell's most achieved solo work – though, even here, he relied on his wife China Cammell as co-writer. Based on *Mrs White*,



a novel by brothers Andrew and Laurence Klavan (writing under the joint pseudonym Margaret Tracy), it's by default Cammell's '1980s' movie. Just being a Cannon film locates it in the Reagan decade but it also dwells lovingly on its array of hideous mullets and fluffy perms – it's even a plot point that all the women in the film except the straight-haired blonde heroine model their look on local rich slut Ann Mason (Alberta Watson). A burbling yet steely electro-acoustic score from Rick Fenn and Pink Floyd's Nick Mason makes the film's soundscape comparable to Michael Rubini's work on *Manhunter* or Wang Chung's on *To Live and Die in L.A.* Even the 1970s flashbacks have a bleached-out look that screams 1987.

The plot of *White of the Eye* is squarely in the 80s tradition of Brian De Palma's MTV Hitchcockery, talking-point slasher movies such as *Fatal Attraction* or *Jagged Edge* and 'mad dad' horrors like *The Shining* and *The Stepfather*. It skews away from crackpot male self-exploration and the objectification of murdered women, as exemplified by serial killer Paul White (David Keith), a sound expert who installs stereo systems in the homes of wealthy clients, towards a critique of the attitudes embodied in most commercial thrillers of the period, thanks to the livewire performance of Cathy Moriarty as Joan, Paul's loving yet angry wife.

As the work of a European artist stranded in a hallucinated America, *White of the Eye* bears comparison with John Boorman's *Point Blank* (1967), Ken Russell's *Altered States* (1980), Wim Wenders's *Paris, Texas* (1984) or Louis Malle's *Atlantic City* (1980). Cammell shifted the location from the Connecticut suburb of the novel to the environs of Tucson, Arizona. This enables him, like every other British filmmaker given the chance to put on a cowboy hat, to evoke the Wild West of the movies and also the myth's latterday hippie incarnation as the playground of hallucinogenic Native American wisdom. It incarnates the New West in a cowboy-talking, Indian-sympathising protagonist who uses weird Apache humming techniques to map out the soundscape of a room before installing stereo speakers. However, he's also a woman-hating murderer. Cammell's work is shot through with mysticism of various forms but he was self-aware enough to have his heroine take a cold, clear view of her husband's Carlos Castañeda rationale for disembowelling women and call bullshit on it.

The film opens almost with a parody of the De Palma method circa *Dressed to Kill* or *Body Double*. A viewpoint male gaze (a store clerk toting a bag of groceries) ogles a wealthy, glamorous, coiffured Tucson housewife who turns to reward the viewer with a come-on smile. She then returns to her interior-design-magazine show home to find a single item out of place – a goldfish flapping in an haute cuisine dish – before an intruder attacks, slamming her head in slow motion against a shattering mirror. The perfect meal is violated as splashes of sauce or juice stand in for the explicit dismemberment De Palma would have delivered. The dogged detective (Art Evans) who remarks that the crime scene is like a Picasso is sneered at



Director Donald Cammell

by colleagues who don't care how cultured the killer is but just want him caught.

It takes almost an hour to confirm that Paul is the murderer but Cammell doesn't really play the is-he-isn't-he game of *Jagged Edge* or cloud the issue enough to make it a whodunit. (John Diehl had his entire role as Joan's boss eliminated – snipping one whole suspect off the shortlist.)

In the 1976 backstory, New York dropout Joan is travelling across country with her multi-ethnic big-city boyfriend Mike (Alan Rosenberg) when they stop in Arizona to fix an eight-track she's stubbed a cigarette into rather than listen to Hot Chocolate's 'You Sexy Thing' one more time. This takes the couple to Paul, who's beginning a stellar career in appliance repair and customising, and winds up as a mini-*Performance* of switched identities and a gruesome Apache deerhunting ritual. The upshot is that Mike becomes a perhaps psychic brain-damaged

*As the work of a European artist stranded in a hallucinated America, it bears comparison with Boorman's 'Point Blank'*




Cathy Moriarty as Paul's wife Joan

husk while Paul walks into the 80s with Joan as his wife and the mother of his child (Danielle Smith). In a comedy of errors, Joan thinks (rightly) that Paul is having an affair with Ann Mason, and skewers his tyres when she finds his van parked behind the other woman's house... though in fact he's actually in a nearby home murdering an Ann-lookalike (Mimi Lieber).

The film shifts gear into dementia – and abandons the police investigation – when Joan finds Paul's gruesome trophies hidden in the house. Paul makes himself up with a samurai topknot and painted face, strapping dynamite around his torso and pursuing his wife and daughter in Big Bad Wolf fashion. In most 1980s family horrors, the threat is primarily against the child – but Cammell (who famously avoided his own child) has almost no interest in the daughter and lets her wander out of the climax.

The film signs off with an extraordinary three-way confrontation in a desert quarry as Joan witnesses the culmination of a struggle between her chaingun-wielding ex-boyfriend and her suicide-vested husband ("Can I pick 'em?") which quotes from Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot le fou* and settles the issue in a spectacular detonation that not only resolves the plot but alters the landscape.

Arrow has gone above and beyond the call of duty with this title. The look of the film on Blu-ray is exponentially better than the VHS-era dupes that have been the easiest way to see it since its brief theatrical exposure. The Macdonald-Rodley documentary (which includes a great deal of interview material with Cammell from the 70s) is invaluable context for his whole career; the commentary track by his biographer Sam Umland (which usefully amends some of the myths put forward in the documentary) provides detailed analysis of this film; and the nicely designed booklet includes an insightful piece by *Sight & Sound*'s Brad Stevens, a note by Umland on *The Argument* and brief but very interesting notes from producer Elliott Kastner. 



# New releases

## ACE IN THE HOLE

Billy Wilder; USA 1951; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate PG; 111 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: introduction by Neil Sinyard, interview with Wilder, original US trailer, booklet

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Billy Wilder was often called cynical but compared to *Ace in the Hole* the rest of his output is a mush-pot of human kindness. Possibly the sourest movie ever to come out of Hollywood, it stars Kirk Douglas at his most abrasive as Chuck Tatum, a reptilian Albuquerque reporter who happens across a guy trapped in an underground crevice and deliberately slows the rescue bid to make himself a bigger story. But it's not just Tatum – everyone furthers their own ends at the expense of the poor dying bozo. Perhaps the script's choicest line – which Wilder always credited to his wife Audrey – comes when the newsman suggests to the victim's wife (trash-blonde Jan Sterling) that it might look good were she to invoke divine help. "I don't go to church," she snarls. "Kneeling bags my nylons."

*Ace* was Wilder's first film as his own producer, and his first major flop, with the critics and at the box office. Not surprisingly, perhaps; it savages not only the press but also the audience – depicting reporters as callous, mercenary fixers and the public as gullible sensation-seekers. Time has caught up with the movie: nowadays Tatum's tactics would be seen as all too credible but at the time, as Wilder later acknowledged, "They didn't believe me that when somebody's a newspaperman, they are *capable* of that behaviour." Paramount, to Wilder's annoyance, tried to salvage the film by retitling it *The Big Carnival*. It didn't help.

Wilder is rarely thought of as a strongly visual director but, alongside its caustic human dynamic, *Ace* impresses as spectacle. As the story, shrewdly manipulated by Tatum, spreads across the country, cars, trucks, trailers and specially laid-on trains disgorge hordes of rubbernecks. A carnival outfit – rather too nudgingly called the Great S&M Amusement Corporation – sets up shop and a glutinous theme song dedicated to the victim ("We're coming, we're coming, Leo") is endlessly blared out. From the high perspective of the cave entrance, Wilder's camera surveys an ever-expanding ocean of morbid sentimentality.

**Disc:** Eureka's transfer does full justice to Charles Lang's black-and-white photography. Neil Sinyard contributes an enthused, informative intro; Michel Ciment's feature-length interview with Wilder dates from 1998.

## THE BIG HOUSE

George Hill/Paul Fejos/Ward Wing; USA 1930; Warner Archives/Region 1 NTSC DVD; 87/90/88 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: alternate versions in English, French and Spanish

### Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

The ur-text for prison melodramas, this early talkie classic is many times more dynamic, thorny and unsentimental than you'd suppose, given the vintage and the legacy of mawkishness that saturated the subgenre for decades thereafter. It was an ambitious product of Irving Thalberg's MGM, and from the outset resonates with suggestive dystopian design – clearly, the nightmarish futurism of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*

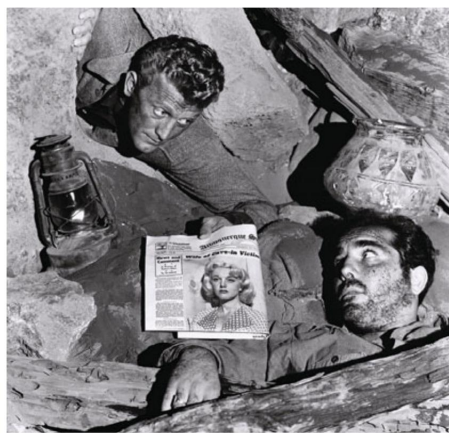
(1927) was taken by art director Cedric Gibbons to be an analogue of contemporary prison life, and so this movie's massive penitentiary sets and compositions consciously evoke the great German film's hyperbolic anti-humanism, down to the marching columns of proles and the great cement walls of confinement. (The primary set, an expansive vertical layer cake of cages and catwalks, is surveyed by awesome crane movements up and down as the prisoners enter and exit their closet-sized cells.)

We begin by following shocked newbie Robert Montgomery as he is inducted into prison life, but soon the focus falls on the bunkmates: muscular, pig-ignorant bulldog Wallace Beery and his savvy, tolerant dog-keeper Chester Morris. What seem like stereotypes quickly become unpredictable, as Montgomery's naive but cagey kid covers his own ass, Beery's blustery, homicidal monster impulsively begins a one-man war against the prison's brutal conditions, and Morris's honour-bound schemer is betrayed and thus compelled to escape and try to build a new identity outside.

Consistently, the film's character-actor harmlessness is undercut by real and implicit violence; Beery in particular plays most of his scenes for blinkered comedy but is nevertheless an indelible threat to everyone around him. (The climactic breakout sequence, when a bloodthirsty Beery finally gets his hands on machine guns and is met with anti-personnel tanks, is a stunner.)

This invaluable DVD edition ups the stakes by including two alternate versions of the film, shot simultaneously with different primary casts but with the same storyboards and wide shots, in French by peripatetic émigré Paul Fejos (with a new-to-Hollywood Charles Boyer in the Morris role) and in Spanish by nobody Ward Wing. It was a fascinating studio gambit – precipitated by the non-viability of subtitling or dubbing in 1930 – which in effect conjured inherently European films, with helplessly native inflections and sensibilities, as doppelgangers of purely American product. The alternate casting never quite measures up to the original (Beery was not a common quantity in any language) but otherwise it's like watching a strand of film history manifest in parallel dimensions.

**Disc:** Clean, untrammelled archival prints of all three, with a regrettable lack of contextualising supplement.



Sinking low: 'Ace in the Hole'

## CELLULOID MAN

Shivendra Singh Dungarpur; India 2012; Second Run/Region-free DVD; 150 minutes; 1.85:1 anamorphic; Features: director interview, booklet

### Reviewed by Michael Brooke

We often read sweeping accounts of the destruction of film heritage, but a sequence in the middle of this enthralling portrait of P.K. Nair, founder of India's National Film Archive in Pune, graphically shows the constituent parts of old film prints being separated so that the silver in the emulsion can be used to make jewellery, while the remaining celluloid, now hanging in heartbreakingly transparent ribbons, awaits reprocessing into cheap bangles.

Which is partly why, out of more than 1,200 films made during India's silent era (1912-31), only a dozen are thought to survive – and it's largely thanks to Nair that we even have those. Although much of his professional life was spent sitting in front of a screen or a Steenbeck (often accompanied by wide-eyed student acolytes getting up at 6.30am to join him in examining new acquisitions), he also personally crisscrossed the country in search of materials (the older the better) and arranged print swaps with his counterparts abroad, as likely to involve outstanding world cinema as good prints of Indian films.

Along the way there's a great deal of Indian film history, as well as accounts of how Indian audiences responded to foreign pictures – Nair would loan prints to film societies, who in turn would show *Bicycle Thieves* and *Rashomon* to farmers in far-flung regions, while Nair himself would happily screen movies to visiting pilgrims at hair-raisingly unsociable hours. Like his great French counterpart Henri Langlois, Nair made his own rules, and this documentary drops heavy hints that he wasn't always especially popular with politicians and other cultural institutions – yet the fact that he's had no obvious successor speaks tragically for itself.

**Disc:** Polemically shot on 16mm instead of video, the film has occasional scratches that chime well with more severe defects in the many archival clips: indeed, the film includes a paean to the expressiveness of print damage. The English subtitles might seem surprising for a film almost entirely in the same language, but they're discreet enough to tune out and prove surprisingly useful, not least given the constant citations of Indian names, places and film titles. Director Shivendra Singh Dungarpur contributes a video interview and a revealing production diary that goes into more detail about the convoluted industry politics touched on in the film.

## THE CHILDREN'S FILM FOUNDATION COLLECTION: RUNAWAYS

### JOHNNY ON THE RUN/HIDE AND SEEK/TERRY ON THE FENCE

Lewis Gilbert/David Eady/Frank Godwin; 1953/72/86; BFI/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 57/59/66 minutes; 1.37:1/1.85:1; Features: illustrated essay booklet

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

This is the fifth themed selection from the CFF's capacious back-catalogue (Saturday-morning matinees, reinforced later by the





## ALL IS LUST

Completed just before his death, Rainer Werner Fassbinder's take on a Jean Genet murder tale is an eerie, feverish musing on male longing

## QUERELLE

Rainer Werner Fassbinder; West Germany/France 1982; Artificial Eye/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 108 minutes; 2.36:1; Features: Volker Schlöndorff intro, featurette, trailer

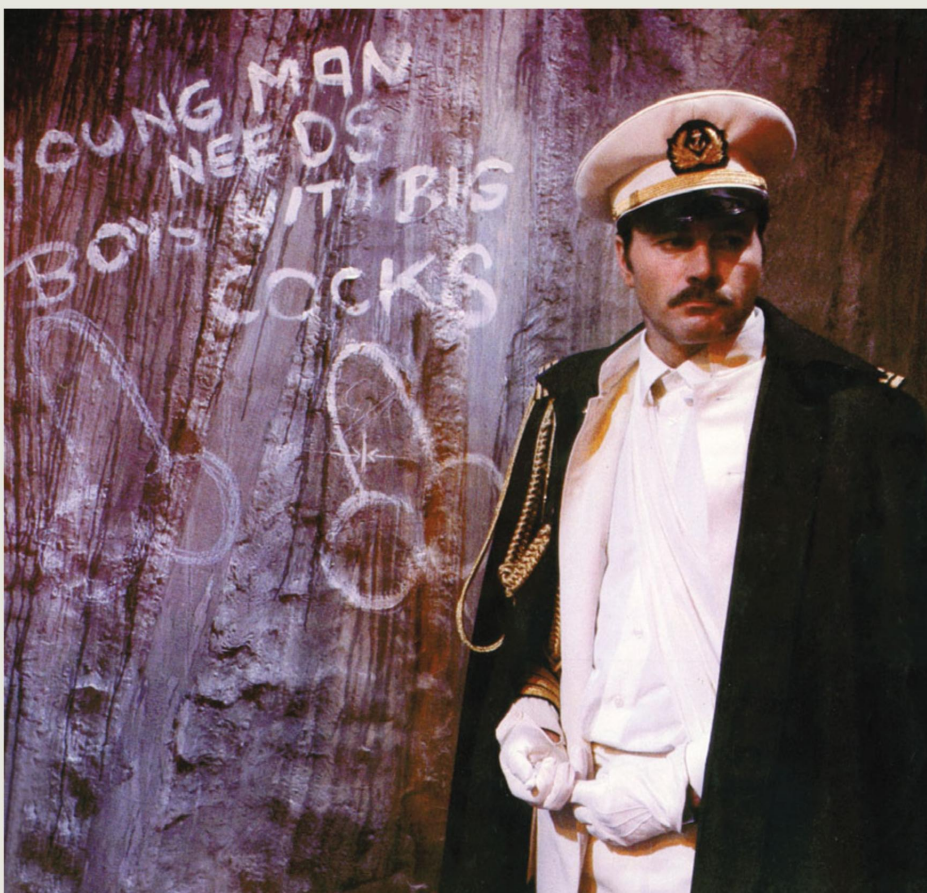
## Reviewed by Charlie Fox

Sinking into the depths of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Querelle*, the last film of that legendarily industrious career, is a rare and wicked joy. He was asked to script a scuzzy social-realist version of Jean Genet's 1953 murder tale *Querelle of Brest* and this is what he concocted: a luscious homoerotic fantasia about the allure of pure evil, and one of the strangest requiems in cinema history, a Franco-German co-production performed in the strung-out English of a badly dubbed noir flick, less a definitive 'last work' than a spooky dissolution, the feverishly carnal reverie of a chronic voyeur darkly flowering on film. In this restored print, it looks like a smouldering triumph.

While *Querelle* was shot, Fassbinder was gorging on drugs and soaking his system in booze. There's a fascinating German documentary, *Fassbinder: Das letzte Jahr* (*The Last Year*), unfortunately absent from the extras here, in which you can watch the director roaming the cavernous set like a wounded bear, mumbling orders and smoking furiously, a pint glass of whisky, vaguely diluted, forever in hand. A typical frenzy, the shoot lasted 20 days. Within two months of its completion, Fassbinder was dead, his heart stopped by a mixture of cocaine and sleeping pills: fatal but long a common part of his nightly drug intake.

*Querelle* is the woozily experimental erotic postscript to his mammoth oeuvre, possibly bewildering for devotees in its apparent lack of the director's trademark blistering cruelty, carefully hollowed out to suit a piece of languid exoticism. Brad Davis plays the title role, a murderer and mythic paragon of masculine beauty who transfixes all those who encounter him. The supporting cast includes Jeanne Moreau as the Tarot-reading Madame Lysiane, a junkie white-witch and ragged songbird; Laurent Malet as Querelle's aristocratic brother Roger; and the solitary, aching figure of Captain Seblon, creepily incarnated by Franco Nero.

What plot there is flickering through the film's druggy bathhouse atmosphere is merely the lineaments of a low-grade thriller: a few killings, some whispered secrets and a lazily undertaken double cross. The acting is profoundly unnatural, evoking the sinister mindlessness of mannequins. Spellbinding sexual obsession might easily double as an icy re-enactment of narcotic stupor. Where you are exactly is impossible to know – perhaps run ashore in an



Creepy incarnation: Franco Nero as Captain Seblon in *Querelle*

imaginary Tangier from the middle of the last century, or in a steam-shrouded dream-territory haunted by hulking ships and sleepwalking sailors, or, just like in Genet's own short film *Un chant d'amour* (1950), lost inside a shimmering world of prison-cell fantasy. The sprawling port is a set of exultant artifice, flooded with the orange light from permanently melting skies.

Hiding inside this soft-focus haze is Fassbinder's seductive history of queer mythology. Exploring a text by the regal *poète maudit* of homosexuality means that the director can go prowling through a vast underworld tradition flamed into being by Genet's prose, including flashes of Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks* (1953), the saintly radiance of Andy Warhol's *Blow Job* (1963) and Robert Mapplethorpe's luxuriant photographs of hardcore practices in New York's S&M clubs. The camera cruises over the exquisitely sculpted male flesh that appears in every scene. This makes for a film oddly scarred by its own innocence, because conjuring

*It is a luscious homoerotic fantasia about the allure of pure evil, and one of the strangest requiems in cinema history*

this subterranean life, so totally consumed by everything 'sinful' about homosexuality, also inevitably summons the spectre of Aids. Through fantasy, *Querelle* records the last breath of a subculture invested in the uninhibited exploration of sexuality, just before the full horror of the virus became known and everything turned apocalyptic. That the film's (and therefore Fassbinder's) last words are a scribbled note from Genet confessing "the date of my death seems near" only adds to its ghoulish premonitory chill.

What *Querelle* answers is a weird craving that haunts Fassbinder's collected works, a desire for a film utterly intoxicated by its own system of bewitchment. Any contemplation of Fassbinder's late films involves tracing the flight towards this fantasy. *Querelle*'s first rumblings are contained in the nightmarish epilogue to *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1980), with its death-dance of punk angels and Weimar decay; *Veronika Voss* is a coke fiend's dream of snowily sumptuous whites and mirrored interiors; and *Lola* (1981) is a rush of intoxicating Technicolor. Fassbinder is much more of a sensualist, prone to hallucination, than many yet realise. As an eerie soliloquy on male longing, *Querelle* remains unmatched. Through the fervour of his lust, Fassbinder made that rare thing, a film in which, as Genet wrote, "every shadow seems to me desirable."



# New releases

**⬅** BBC's bottomless CFF-cache 'Friday Film Special', obviously created audiences for whom these films are an unparalleled Proustian rush). Gathering up a trio of troubled bolters and tearaways, all of whom commit petty crimes, this release has an interesting, slightly darker feel throughout, though it lacks a standout title to rival the John Krish, Michael Powell or *Sammy's Super T-Shirt* offerings of previous collections. However, Lewis Gilbert's thoughtful 1953 tale of a Polish refugee's odyssey from bigoted Edinburgh backstreets to a miraculous 'international children's village' (complete with its own parliament) is beautifully shot and played. Eugeniusz Chylek, who never acted again after playing Janek/Johnny, brings a neorealist naturalism and vulnerability that sit sweetly beside comedy burglar Sydney Tafler's Flash Harry snarls and pratfalls.

Rather livelier, and leading its comic supporting cast a merry dance, is David Eady's 1972 Raleigh Choppers-coppers-and-robbers drama *Hide and Seek*, in which Gary Kemp's straight-up teen aids a runaway Borstal boy seeking out his crime-boss father, in glamorous widescreen. With its smart-mouthed, resilient children, believably scruffy London locations and seedily inept adults (Alan Lake and Robin Askwith with delight as a pair of gobby fake-policemen) it combines classic CFF ingredients with élan.

Topping off the set is veteran Frank Godwin's positively gritty *Terry on the Fence* (1986), which introduces an active air of menace into the dilemma of a boy strong-armed by a local gang into robbing his school. Presumably to distinguish itself from similar if softer TV fare, it features an edgy amount of swearing, thieving and slapping, and a pervasive sense of overkill that illustrates vividly how hard it was for the underfunded and outmanoeuvred children's feature to keep its old niche in a new era.

**Disc:** The first two films, remastered from 35mm, are in good nick, the 70s reds in *Hide and Seek* popping like an air rifle. *Terry on the Fence*, which was shot in 16mm, doesn't brush up quite as well, and has a small amount of onscreen crackle at one point. The booklet's high points are the cheery reminiscences of Gary Kemp and Neville Watson, celebrating the off- and on-set fun of their respective movies and mourning the Greenwich now obliterated by millennial projects.

## FRAGMENTS OF KUBELKA

Martina Kudláček; Austria 2012; Edition Filmmuseum/Region 0 DVD; 232 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: 16-page booklet with essays in English, German and French

**Reviewed by Michael Pattison**

Vienna-born Martina Kudláček follows her previous chronicles of avant-garde filmmakers (Alexander Hammid, Maya Deren, Marie Menken) with this gargantuan introduction to fellow Austrian Peter Kubelka. Born in 1934, Kubelka is a filmmaker, theoretician and co-founder of the Austrian Film Museum, who has amassed an extensive and eclectic collection of archaeological artefacts over the decades, which he utilises today in lengthy film-school lectures.

These objects feature heavily in the interviews here, which were conducted between 2007 and



**Mann's inhumanity: *Men in War***

2011. In between, Kubelka talks us through his family history, and Kudláček interweaves archive footage of his days in New York (where he co-founded the Anthology Film Archives in 1970) as well as limited footage of his actual films being projected (though his body of work amounts to around an hour of screen time, the films are absent here because Kubelka remains staunchly against their digitisation).

Kubelka is a generous interviewee, whose incessant theorising often courts truism. Kudláček's film is a fine introduction but its most fascinating passages are those focusing on Kubelka's curatorial achievements in post-war New York, where, in contrast to Europe, he found an audience hungry for avant-garde cinema. **Disc:** Kudláček's appreciably low-budget, handheld aesthetic is afforded typical care from Edition Filmmuseum, with the film split over two discs. Respecting Kubelka's own wishes, there are no subtitles.

## THE GARDEN OF WORDS

Shinkai Makoto; Japan 2013; Anime Limited/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 46 minutes; 16:9; Features: Japanese and English voice tracks, commentaries by director and US dub team, director and cast interviews, storyboard

**Reviewed by Andrew Osmond**

This gorgeous animated film is Japanese but should appeal equally to anime enthusiasts and fans of independent cartoon fare such as *The Illusionist* (2010) and *Mary and Max* (2009).

*The Garden of Words* is only 46 minutes long but it received a theatrical release in Japan, where viewers could purchase the Blu-ray in the cinema foyer. Many of them could also visit the film's location. With lush hyperrealism, *The Garden of Words* depicts present-day Tokyo, and specifically Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden in the city centre. Here, a withdrawn schoolboy plays truant on rainy days, encountering a beautiful woman who fascinates him; their strange friendship continues through Tokyo's rainy season.

A story themed around wind and rain is a splendid conceit for an animation, and these become the film's strongest expressions. The images are created by traditional animation and computer simulation (reportedly a half-and-half blend). The images of rain sheeting over leaves, earth and water are worth viewing beside *Bambi's* little April shower or *My Neighbour Totoro's* bus-stop scene. The

occasional shot feels overworked but then so did some of Disney's in its lushest heyday.

The character animation isn't comparable to Disney's but the human story is thoughtful and mostly understated, a portrait of two attractive, lonely people tentatively connecting. The melodramatic denouement feels catastrophic on first viewing but less damaging when one re-watches the film. (Viewers should stay for the coda after the end credits.) Prior to *Garden*, director Shinkai Makoto was already known for depicting frustrated teenage relationships, most strongly in his 2007 animated film *5 Centimeters per Second*. Against his backlist, the resolution of *The Garden of Words* feels veritably cathartic.

**Disc:** The bright, sharp transfer brings out the phenomenally detailed images. The film's 'animatic', or semi-animated storyboard, is interspersed with live-action shots used for reference. Shinkai's remarks in the commentary and extended interview are often enlightening.

## LE MANI SULLA CITTA

Francesco Rosi; Italy 1963; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 100 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: interview with Rosi and screenwriter Raffaele La Capria, booklet

**Reviewed by Philip Kemp**

"The characters and events shown are imaginary," reads the end title of *Le mani sulla città* (*Hands over the City*), "but the social and environmental context is real." Following up his first international hit, *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962), Francesco Rosi revisited his native Naples for a trenchant, angry but ultimately despairing look at the corruption and greed polluting the city.

The title is graphically illustrated in the opening shot. From a vertiginous swoop past the Tetris-like apartment blocks packed around the city, the camera pans rightwards to bring a pudgy, grasping pair of hands into frame. They belong to Edoardo Grotto (Rod Steiger), a wealthy developer and member of the rightwing bloc on the city council, who is outlining to his cronies the rich pickings to be had from an undeveloped parcel of publicly owned land.

After a scarily realistic sequence in which a building in the old quarter collapses, killing two people and crippling a small boy, the action homes in on the vicious infighting within the council, while successive officials blandly pass the buck. The ruling rightwing group disclaim all responsibility for the accident, express outrage at accusations of graft, and prepare to ditch Grotto to save their own hides. The attack on them is led by an impassioned bulldog of a communist, De Vita (played by real-life Naples city councillor Carlo Fermariello).

In fact most of the cast, remarkably enough, were actual Naples city councillors playing themselves. Steiger (dubbed, though judging by his lip movements he's speaking Italian) takes top billing but doesn't dominate; Fermariello gets as much screen time, as does Angelo D'Alessandro as Balsamo, a centre-party councillor whose conscience starts to trouble him. Voicing his misgivings to his party leader, he's told: "In political life, moral indignation is a worthless commodity. You know what the only true sin is? Losing." In its



exposure of civic rottenness fed by greed and expediency, Rosi's film is still all too relevant. **Disc:** A crisp high-definition transfer enhances the impact of the film.

## MEN IN WAR

Anthony Mann; USA 1957; Olive Films/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 NTSC DVD; 102 minutes; 1.78:1

**Reviewed by Michael Atkinson**

Maybe the first and maybe the only 'art war film' – that is, a textually orthodox expression of a standard Hollywood genre with the pensive, interiorised personality of the Bergman/Mizoguchi/Antonioni zeitgeist – Mann's masterpiece for some reason still occupies a middling and dusty corner on the canon's shelf. Perhaps its modest scale discourages superlatives; maybe Mann's reputation has been seen too intensely through the bitter lens of the James Stewart westerns of the 50s. *Men in War* is in any case the definitive existentialist war saga, trumping both Raymond Bernard's *Wooden Crosses* (1932) and Lewis Milestone's *A Walk in the Sun* (1945), among others, as an exploration of the dehumanisation of war's experience.

Part of its ominous grace derives from what Mann and screenwriter Philip Yordan conscientiously leave out: voluminous backstory, heroic action, sociopolitical context, melodrama, patriotism. What's left is the iconic, quasi-Beckettian prison maze of the deracinated, war-racked landscape, peopled by lost souls under mysterious fire – that is, war in its purest metaphoric form.

Set in the Korean War, the narrative lands with a crippled platoon hunkered down in an anonymous valley, waiting and going slightly crazy and suffering the silence. They are led by Robert Ryan's weathered lieutenant, a man

clearly trying to hold on to his last strands of humanity by getting them to safe ground. It's all ellipses, whispers, unspoken fears and exhaustion, cut into a fragmented dream – until a recalcitrant Aldo Ray defiantly appears behind the wheel of a jeep with his catatonic colonel (Robert Keith) in the passenger seat, initiating a last push by the men to take a hill and rejoin a regiment that may no longer be there.

The film pioneers a few paradigms that would become ubiquitous social imagery in the following decade, including the first infantry helmet decorated with flowers, and Ray's pre-Nam proto-defector-rebel, ready to kill his own officers to survive. But the film's mastery is entirely textural: the hushed pallor that falls on the soldiers when faced with a minefield; the apocalyptic cant proclaiming "we're the last" to fight a war with no discernible purpose; the overall attention given to space and time as the soldiers stalk, watch and encroach on each other. (David Thomson memorably characterised the film as "so physical one could draw a contour map of the terrain"). It's arguably the most emotionally mature American war movie made before the 70s.

**Disc:** Fine transfer from an archival print.

## THE PEOPLE VS. PAUL CRUMP

William Friedkin; USA 1962; Facets/Region 0 NTSC DVD; 60 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: booklet, production stills, script excerpts

**Reviewed by Michael Atkinson**

An authentic stray dog in the first gathering packs of the American New Wave, William Friedkin's directorial debut was made for network TV when he was still in his twenties, and when American TV was still a Wild West without norms and orthodoxies. For whatever reason it was never aired, and has only been

seen in the decades since via old prints very occasionally showing up at film festivals.

It's a hot-button, nuance-free example of postwar American journalism, historically an outraged forecast of Errol Morris's *The Thin Blue Line* (Friedkin made a pro-police TV documentary with that title in 1966), both in its subject (the case of an unjustly convicted death-row convict) and its means-justifying-ends approach to what was then fashionably *vérité* non-fiction filmmaking. A Chicagoan, like Friedkin, Crump was framed for a stockyards robbery-murder, and the film trails along after reporter John Justin Smith as he interviews Crump and struggles to suss out the facts. But Friedkin's approach is proto-Kiarostamian, producing hyperbolic reenactments, scripting the dramatic jailhouse dialogues and employing reflexive activist-slash-genre iconography (our first glimpse of the Cook County jail includes a blast of forlorn harmonica), thus giving the short documentary the fictionalised confrontationalism of a Woody Guthrie protest song or a labour recruitment poster.

This slippery relationship to reality grows more viscous with the presence of Crump's mother Lonnie, playing herself with fierce earnestness in flashbacks, trying to detour the Chicago cops away from arresting her son – who's portrayed by another black man altogether. In a sense, the unhidden theatricality at work is as fundamental as any folk-art retelling of a true event.

Brief and cutthroat, Friedkin's film did to some degree do the work for which it was intended – reportedly, even without being broadcast, its existence contributed to Crump not going to the electric chair. (He spent 39 years in stir before being paroled, and died in a state mental hospital in 2002.) Compared to the even-tempered activist docs being made today, it fairly seethes.

**Disc:** Fine digital restoration (something Facets is not famous for), with essay by Professor Susan Doll.

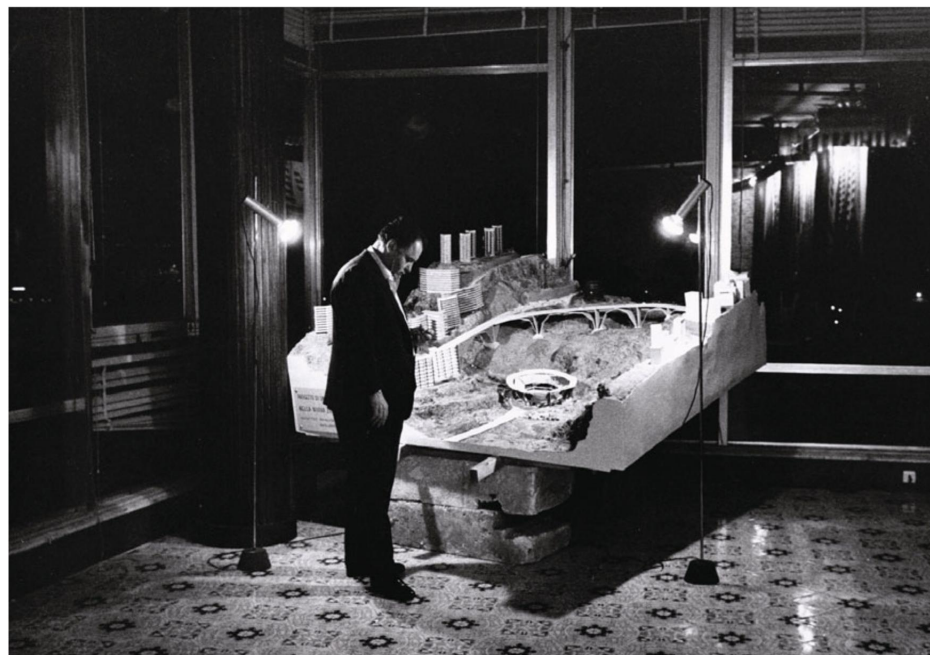
## THE SICILIAN CLAN

Henri Verneuil; France/Italy/USA 1969; 20th Century Fox/Region-free Blu-ray and DVD; 125 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: retrospective documentary, introduction by Fred Cavayé, English-language version (118 minutes), booklet

**Review by Sergio Angelini**

As a youngster growing up in Italy in the 70s and 80s, I found my attention gripped by regular TV screenings of this thriller. Sure, the fleeting nudity probably had something to do with it, and Ennio Morricone's killer score still holds up, but there is something of the playground ethos in this story of crooks, thieves, murderers and cops who are completely intertwined and largely interchangeable.

A big-budget drama filmed in France, Italy and the US, it stars Alain Delon as the damned career criminal on the run, Jean Gabin as the ageing Mafia boss looking to retire to Sicily, Amedeo Nazzari, Italy's great matinee idol of yore, as Gabin's old 'family' friend from New York, and Lino Ventura as the newly (and thus irritably) nicotine-free cop who will stop at nothing to arrest them. Irina Demick brings a much needed female dimension to the proceedings, though unfortunately she is mostly used



**Le mani sulla città** Trenchant, angry but ultimately despairing... In its exposure of civic rottenness fed by greed and expediency, Rosi's film is still all too relevant



# Television

## AIRWOLF – SEASONS 1-3

Belisarius Productions/Universal/CBS; USA 1984-86; Fabulous Films/Region B Blu-ray; 2,707 minutes; Certificate 12; 4:3

**Reviewed by Sergio Angelini**

This action-driven, very intense mid-1980s show offers little time to focus on its manifest illogicalities, unlike most of the many other 'hardware' series from the time such as *Knight Rider*, *Automan*, *Street Hawk*, *Blue Thunder* and *The Highwayman* – and is mostly the better for it, for all its romantic eccentricities.

Jan-Michael Vincent is Stringfellow Hawke (presumably a wink to James Fenimore Cooper), the best helicopter pilot in the world, who has retreated to his cabin in the wilderness to commune with nature (he serenades eagles with his cello). But when the wicked David Hemmings heads to Libya with the prototype of the eponymous jet-propelled attack 'copter, which can break the sound barrier, 'String' agrees to come out of retirement if the CIA renews its search for his brother, MIA in Vietnam for a decade. To make sure they hold up their end of the bargain, at mission's end he steals the Airwolf and hides it inside a mountain. Ernest Borgnine provides the comic support as the co-pilot, which is just as well, since Hawke makes for a particularly stern hero, either driving the bird so furiously as to seem to be suffering from haemorrhoids, or being incredibly crotchety even with the damsels in distress that he's saving from Soviet oppression ("I like your spunk but if you don't start speaking English I'm going to spank your butt").

Among the (usually less interesting) episodes set on domestic soil, there is an amusing riff on *36 Hours*, the 1965 James Garner war movie, with villains trying to make String think it's 1985 with a fake newspaper headline detailing the divorce of Charles and Diana.

Efforts would be made in subsequent seasons to lighten things up by adding more romance and a fetching co-lead in Jean Bruce Scott, whose adoration for the pilot went sadly unrequited. This is a show that is at its best when soaring in the air with some very well choreographed action sequences, all of which were recycled endlessly in the abysmal low-budget fourth season (not included here) that was made years later purely for syndication purposes and wrote out all the main characters in its opening episode.

**Disc:** Remastered in high definition from the 35mm masters, the series looks terrific on Blu-ray, with Sylvester Levay's propulsive synth score coming through loud and clear.

## BANACEK

Universal/NBC; USA 1972-74; Fabulous Films/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 670 minutes (Season 1), 568 minutes (Season 2); 4:3; Features: 'Detour to Nowhere' pilot (Season 1), textless title sequence (Season 2)

**Reviewed by Sergio Angelini**

A popular but short-lived mystery series (it is said that it could have run much longer had lead actor George Peppard not been going through a messy divorce), *Banacek* features a freelance insurance investigator who specialises in returning precious goods stolen under seemingly impossible circumstances. Priceless paintings, sculptures



**Pilots episode: Airwolf**

and religious icons as well as prototypes of new cars and giant supercomputers all disappear while under guard, and a football player inexplicably goes missing somewhere between the changing room and the pitch. Perhaps best of all is a story involving an armoured truck containing millions in gold bullion that apparently drives off a cliff and vanishes.

While the plots are clever, the series rather lacks individuality, banking almost solely on the charms of its lead. Our Polish hero is given to spouting Charlie Chan-style aphorisms (in a case involving millions of dollars in fine art stolen from a heavily guarded convoy, he sagely opines that, "a wise man never tries to warm himself in front of a painting of a fire") when not correcting people's pronunciation of his name.

This was just one of a smorgasbord of American detective shows in the 1970s with an 'ethnic' slant, filing right next to the likes of Barry Newman in *Petrocelli*, Robert Blake in *Baretta*, Judd Hirsch in *Delvecchio*, Joe Don Baker in *Eischied*, James McEachin in *Tenafly* and David Birney as *Serpico*, but really following the massive success of Peter Falk's *Columbo*. Like that show, mysteries are feature-length (75 minutes without ad breaks) and can feel padded as a result, though this remains an amiable undertaking that stands out for its avoidance of death and destruction and its privileging of wit and ingenuity.

**Disc:** The pilot episode, directed by Jack Smight, is in the best shape of all but the transfer to disc for both series (available separately) is nonetheless attractive for this vintage.

## THE PROFESSIONALS – MK 1

Avengers Mark I Productions/LWT/ITV; UK 1977-78; Network/Region ABC Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 790 minutes; 4:3; Features: 1996 documentary, isolated music scores, stills galleries, ad bumpers, deleted scenes, 184-page viewing guide by Andrew Pixley

**Reviewed by Sergio Angelini**

In looking to revive old glories with *The New Avengers*, writer-producer Brian Clemens came

a cropper, dissipating much of the original mystique by setting the show on location and more clearly in the real world. He sensibly retooled the show to fit changing times and styles and – with Steed turned into George Cowley (Gordon Jackson), experienced field agent Gambit into Bodie (Lewis Collins) and new recruit Purdey into Doyle (Martin Shaw) – gratifyingly found himself with a giant hit. Despite its reputation, *The Professionals* is never as gritty, sexist or brutal as *The Sweeney* (let alone *Target*) and much less cynical, always aimed at a more international market (the dialogue is stuffed with American slang).

Although the show clearly revels in seeming politically incorrect (Mary Whitehouse was among those who complained about it), it is anxious to have its cake and eat it too. Bodie at one point mocks one of Cowley's pep talks for new recruits at CI5 as being a bit fascist, while the episode 'Klansmen' deals simplistically with the eradication of same agent's racist tendencies (Doyle and Cowley are horrified when Bodie says, "All they did was plant a cross in a spade's garden"). Indeed, this controversial and ultimately banned episode tries so hard to have it both ways (it turns out that both white and black thugs are hidden beneath KKK-style outfits as part of a scam to clear out slum tenants) that today one is more likely to be offended by the weight of its naivety than by its more deliberate provocations.

The mixture of stories in this first set is fairly catholic, with yarns about spies (Clemens was clearly a fan of John le Carré's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, as he named characters after George Smiley and Bill Haydon) and terrorists (including one with the late Roger Lloyd Pack playing a Carlos the Jackal-style assassin known as 'Ramos') rubbing shoulders with more down-to-earth cops-and-robbers stuff, as well as a comedy entry by Dennis Spooner in which Bodie and Doyle spend the whole episode undercover in a bowling alley.

If the shifts in tone in this first season (not to mention the diabolical fashions) are occasionally irksome, and the retrospective spectre of the Comic Strip's sublime parody *The Bullshitters* (1984) certainly looms large, what keeps it all together is the success with which the alpha-male interaction between the hardboiled central trio is sold by its charismatic leads.

Backed by the crashing chords of Laurie Johnson's memorable score (beautifully cleaned up here), after nearly 40 years the dangerous allure of this admittedly two-dimensional adventure series remains largely undimmed.

**Disc:** After decades of substandard presentations on home video, this new Blu-ray edition looks and sounds stunning, lovingly restored from the original film negs. (It is also available on DVD and for download on iTunes.) Alongside deleted scenes, a retrospective documentary made in 1996 and 100 minutes of image galleries (including shots of Anthony Andrews on location as Bodie before being replaced by Collins), the main extra here is a new book by Andrew Pixley that runs to 109,000 words and covers the creation of the series in the author's typically awe-inspiring detail.



# New releases

as a plot device. As with the classic 1955 caper movie *Rififi* (also based on a novel by Auguste Le Breton), it's the women who ultimately destroy the all-male band of criminals.

If the basic template is shopworn – and the climactic hijack sequence over New York occasionally let down by dodgy opticals – it still works as a vehicle for its stars. The film goes to a lot of trouble to make sure that the main actors get an equivalent amount of screen time, cutting between Ventura's investigation, Delon's various escapades (including a leap through a balcony window that would have impressed Jason Bourne) and Gabin and Nazzari rekindling their old friendship. The film is sometimes ponderous (the alternative English version is certainly zippier), though the domestic sequences provide a fascinating if truly diabolical depiction of a patriarchy at work among the criminal classes.

**Disc:** This English-friendly Blu-ray is available in France, Italy and Germany. It includes the 125-minute French cut (with optional subtitles) and the 118-minute English-language edition. Also included is a new hour-long documentary covering, among other things, the anxieties over Delon's involvement in the 'Markovic affair', a political scandal that erupted following the death of the star's former bodyguard.

## THE WAR LORD

Franklin Schaffner; USA 1965; Eureka/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 116 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: trailer, booklet

**Reviewed by Philip Kemp**

In the mid-60s, right at the end of Hollywood's classic epic cycle as it wound down after the box-office disaster of *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964), there came a wholly unexpected late entry: intelligent, offbeat and unbombastic. Indeed, *The War Lord* is almost too small-scale



Tinseltown tale: *What Price Hollywood*

to qualify as an epic – rather than sprawling across the expanses of Ancient Egypt or the Roman Empire, it's confined to one small damp corner of 11th-century northwestern Europe.

According to Charlton Heston, the film's star and the prime mover behind the production, without front-office interference *The War Lord* might have been even more refreshingly unconventional. "The studio was convinced from the beginning that they had the ingredients for a huge tits-and-armor piece. If we'd been allowed to shoot in the English marshes with an English cast, away from the studio's enthusiastic urgings that we spend more money on flaming siege towers, I think we'd have the film we envisioned." And director Franklin Schaffner felt that Universal, which took control after the production ran over budget, cut out much of the best material – "those fragile but always terribly consequential subtleties... so terribly important to character, motivation and reaction".

But even as it is, *The War Lord* has a lot going for it. Heston plays Chrysagón, a Norman knight

sent to guard a marshy stretch of coastland plagued by raids from Frisian pirates. The local villagers, still largely pagan (another unusual element: Christianity isn't privileged as the one true religion), warily accept him until he falls for a local girl, demands her wedding night as *droit de seigneur*, then keeps her with him. Indignant, the locals join with the Frisians to attack him.

Some of the dialogue clunks, and the casting suffers weaknesses: Maurice Evans's priest is fruitfully hammy, and Rosemary Forsyth as the girl feels timid and too California-blond (Heston wanted Julie Christie). But Heston gives a convincingly stiff, anguished performance, the siege sequences are ferocious and vividly detailed, and the ending is anything but triumphalist.

**Disc:** Short on extras but Russell Metty's dour cinematography looks superb on Blu-ray.

## WHAT PRICE HOLLYWOOD

George Cukor; USA 1932; Warner Archive/Region 1 NTSC DVD; 88 minutes; 1.37:1

**Reviewed by Michael Atkinson**

One of the first 'serious' backstage Hollywood melodramas, and the rough draft for William Wellman's full-blown *A Star Is Born*, made just five years later (both shepherded by mega-producer David O. Selznick), George Cukor's early-talkie exposé of heartless Tinseltown life hones in on sassy waitress Constance Bennett, who wheedles her way into the affections of a comically soused producer (short-lived character star Lowell Sherman) and thereafter on to soundstages and into auditions.

The script, based on an Adela Rogers St Johns story, snugly expresses a rags-to-riches Hollywood myth that was already a cliché by 1932 and proceeds very briskly towards that myth's counter-charge: the already diehard belief in the film industry as a shallow, soulless media circus in which honest entities like marriage and everyday 'reality' get ground into dust.

Once a star, Bennett's wisecracking, alabaster demi-moll is largely a vision of mannequin poise in the films-within-the-film we see, and her marriage to Neil Hamilton's wealthy anti-Dream Factory jock quickly becomes the story's primary crisis point. (As opposed to subsequent versions of the St Johns story, Sherman's lame-duck wastrel is not a romantic interest but a curious mixture of unfulfilled ardour and slapstick savoir faire.)

Not quite 'pre-Code' in its sensibility, Cukor's film is justly famous for its cinematography by Charles Rosher, whose best visual set pieces are rousing, mysterious dolly shots from silvery shadow into light, through the layers of illusion that comprise film sets, publicity premieres and the like. (It also sports a lovely montage by Slavko Vorkapich, who is credited.) There are more than a few questionable spurts of misogyny mixed into the story, though perhaps the oddest disconnect is in the movie's vehement point of view about its own milieu – you're never convinced that Cukor, Selznick et al believed Hollywood to be a snake pit, but of course the public did to some degree, and so the story arc panders to this idea even as the characters themselves, from Sherman to Gregory Ratoff's dim-witted-yet-mercenary studio head, seem cynically loveable.

**Disc:** Sweet archival transfer, nothing else.



**The War Lord** Right at the end of Hollywood's classic epic cycle there came this wholly unexpected late entry: intelligent, offbeat and unbombastic



# Lost and found

## MOONRISE

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

In Frank Borzage's final masterpiece, the director's aching romanticism clashes head-on with ultra-noir style

**Reviewed by Philip Kemp**

When a director's basic instincts and the style in which he or she is working are at daggers drawn, the results can be disastrous – or paradoxically fruitful. Few films display this creative tension more effectively than *Moonrise*, the last – and some would say the best – major film directed by Frank Borzage.

*Moonrise* starts in deepest, darkest noir.

A man escorted by two others, all framed from the knees down as they trudge heavily through torrential rain; a hanging, graphically projected as shadows; a howling infant, terrified by a doll hanging by the neck over its cot. Noir, in which protagonists are typically trapped by fate and/or predestination, scarcely comes more doom-laden than that – whereas the dominant theme of Borzage's films is that of redemption through love against all the odds. It's quite a tussle.

Frank Borzage (born in Salt Lake City of Italian parentage, he pronounced his name Borz-ah-ghee) ranked for a while high on the Hollywood A-list. In 1929 *7th Heaven*, his 53rd film, won the first ever Best Director Oscar. It launched a run of highly successful romantic melodramas directed by Borzage, often teaming Charles Farrell and Janet Gaynor. *Bad Girl* (1931) won him a second Oscar, and throughout the 30s he continued to make big-budget movies with major stars – *A Farewell to Arms*, *Man's Castle*, *Desire*, *Three Comrades*, *The Mortal Storm*.

Common to all of these was what Andrew Sarris termed “a genuine concern with the wondrous inner life of lovers in the midst of adversity”. It wasn't a sentiment likely to endear a filmmaker to a more cynical age, and Borzage's reputation slumped badly in the early 1940s. His standing wasn't helped by the reception of *Strange Cargo* (1940), a bizarre religious allegory condemned by the Legion of Decency for its “lustful implications in dialogue and situation”.

By 1945 Borzage was reduced to working for the Poverty Row outfit Republic Pictures, run by Herbert Yates. But now and then Yates aspired to something more ambitious than endless B-westerns, a policy that gave the greenlight to Orson Welles's *Macbeth*, John Ford's *The Quiet Man* – and *Moonrise*.

Generously budgeted by Republic's standards, *Moonrise* (1948) still betrays its technical limitations, being rather too obviously shot in the studio. But then Borzage always preferred to shoot on studio sets, and he turns his restrictions to advantage. Though the action is mostly set outdoors in the streets of a small Virginia town and the surrounding countryside, he creates a pervasive feeling of claustrophobia. The settings



Danny boy: Dane Clark stars in Frank Borzage's *Moonrise*

*The settings seem like an emanation of Danny's troubled mind – especially the swamp country, locus of hidden crimes*

seem like an emanation of the protagonist's troubled mind – especially the swamp country, locus of hidden crimes and festering resentments.

Borzage wanted John Garfield for the lead role of Danny Hawkins, killer's son turned killer himself, but couldn't afford him. Instead he cast Garfield's friend Dane Clark, who gives a rather too one-note performance. But he's backed by a rich support cast: Gail Russell, with her sad expressive eyes, as his schoolteacher girlfriend; Ethel Barrymore in a folksy cameo as

his grandma; Rex Ingram (in what he called “the best role ever written for a Negro”) as Danny's philosophical friend Mose; Lloyd Bridges, venomous as Danny's tormentor/victim; and Allyn Joslyn as the pensive town sheriff. DP John L. Russell, later to shoot *Psycho*, furnishes the deep-textured black-and-white photography with pools of darkness and dangerous stabs of light.

As Danny struggles against what he believes is the ‘bad blood’ pushing him towards violence, it's women – as so often in Borzage's films – who provide the voices of sanity and redemption. Anticipation here of two Nicholas Ray films, *In a Lonely Place* (1950) and *On Dangerous Ground* (1951), which pick up on the same theme.

For all the encroaching shadows, *Moonrise* often achieves romantic intensity. At one point, as the young couple dance together in an abandoned mansion, an ecstatic crane shot tracks back, soars up to gaze on them from the ceiling, then swoops back down into close-up as they kiss. Max Ophüls might have given an approving nod. Borzage slips in some sly satire of small-town mores – the irritatingly jive-talking soda-jerk, the gloriously tacky County Fair with its gum-chewing belly-dancers. And had Hitchcock seen the big-wheel scene when he made *Strangers on a Train*?

Had Borzage stuck to noir conventions and killed Danny off in the last reel, instead of following his own deepest instincts and allowing love and redemption a hard-won victory, *Moonrise* might have been well received. But as it was the film flopped badly and was written off as sentimental and anachronistic, a reversion to the conventions of silent-movie style. (Very much the same criticisms that, a few years later, were levelled at *The Night of the Hunter*.)

Discouraged, his career eroded by the blacklist, Borzage never completed his contract with Republic. He directed two mediocre films ten years later, and died in 1962. ☹

### WHAT THE PAPERS SAID

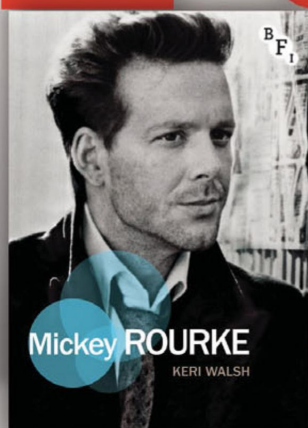


**‘Director Frank Borzage prints a picture of stark realism which grips the heart and imagination. The portrayal by Dane Clark... is a memorable one’**  
‘Monthly Film Bulletin’, December 1948

**‘Perhaps Borzage's greatest film... the perfect answer to those critics who have derided Borzage as a “mere” romantic. Deeply melancholic, the film creates a sense of physical reality with its low-key lighting and harsh compositions that Borzage's lovers on the run cannot defeat’**  
Phil Hardy ‘Time Out’



# Read



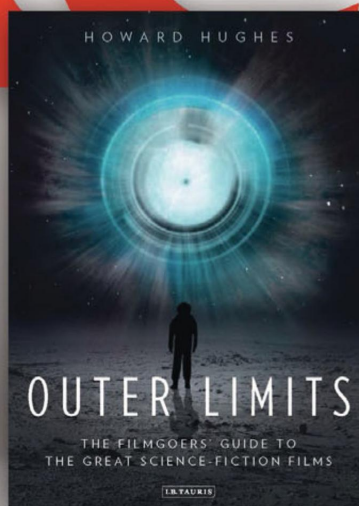
## MICKEY ROURKE

By Keri Walsh, Film Stars series, BFI Publishing/Palgrave Macmillan, paperback, 144pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781844574308

Mickey Rourke has been many things to many people over the course of his 35-year career: a bright young star fresh from the Actors Studio, a Hollywood heart-throb, a professional boxer, a muse to young independent film-makers and a Comic-Con icon.

In this lively study, Keri Walsh analyses Rourke's performances in key films – from *Diner* (1982), *Rumble Fish* (1983) and *9½ Weeks* (1986) to *Sin City* (2005), *The Wrestler* (2008) and *Iron Man 2* (2010) – and traces the development of his star image. Taking an in-depth look at Rourke's career in its cultural and cinematic contexts, Walsh explores how this controversial and undersung star has intrigued audiences from the 1980s to the present day.

<http://goo.gl/C6Xd9X>



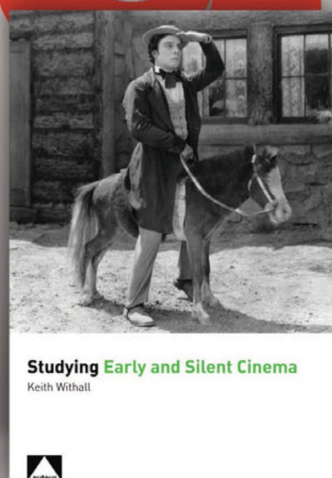
## OUTER LIMITS

**The Filmgoers' Guide to the Great Science-Fiction Films**

By Howard Hughes, I.B. Tauris, paperback, 320pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781780761664

The milestone films of sci-fi cinema from *Metropolis* to *Avatar* are discussed in this Filmgoers' Guide, for anyone who enjoys a cinema that has amazed filmgoers since the dawn of cinema. Illustrated with fine examples of sci-fi film poster art, *Outer Limits* goes deep into the most interesting and popular movies across sci-fi cinema's many forms, with core chapters used as launch pads to discuss lesser-known influential movies and sequels. Films featured include: *The War of the Worlds*, *Independence Day*, *Godzilla*, *The Time Machine*, *The Thing*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Forbidden Planet*, *Barbarella*, *Galaxy Quest*, *Minority Report* and many more.

[www.ibtauris.com](http://www.ibtauris.com)



## STUDYING EARLY AND SILENT CINEMA

By Keith Withall, Auteur Publishing, illustrated, paperback, 180pp, £18.99, ISBN 9781906733698

This accessible introduction to early and silent cinema, currently enjoying a renaissance, provides both a comprehensive chronology of the period until the birth of sound and also a series of detailed case studies on the key films from the period – some well known (including *The Birth of a Nation*, *Strike* and *The Kid*), some less familiar (including Murnau's *The Last Laugh* and Oscar Micheaux's *Within Our Gates*). As well as covering in detail the major filmmaking figures and nations of the period, the author also provides insights into the industry in less well documented areas.

[www.auteur.co.uk](http://www.auteur.co.uk)



## PENELOPE CRUZ

By Ann Davies, Film Stars series, BFI Publishing/Palgrave Macmillan, paperback, 152pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781844574285

Part of a vanguard of Spanish talent claiming success at home and in Hollywood, Penélope Cruz is one of the best-known European stars today.

Focusing on Cruz's key films and their surrounding discourse, Ann Davies explores how the star is called upon to embody different ideas of youthfulness, nationality, exotic otherness, and the mature, established actress. Considering the contradictions of Cruz's star persona – between spontaneity and tightly controlled privacy, between hard work and passive beauty, and between Spain and Hollywood itself – this book charts the development of her career and the questions, difficulties and pleasures it inspires.

<http://goo.gl/DGbBxO>



# Books



Courage under fire: Wyler's *The Memphis Belle: A Story of a Flying Fortress* mixed perilous live footage with a re-enacted soundtrack recorded in a studio

## HOLLYWOOD'S BIG GUNS

### FIVE CAME BACK

#### A Story of Hollywood and the Second World War

By Mark Harris, Canongate, 512pp, £30, hardback, ISBN 9781847678553

#### Reviewed by David Thomson

"The guns are quiet now, the papers of peace have been signed, and the oceans of the earth are filled with ships coming home. In faraway places, men dreamed of this moment – but for some men the moment is very different from the dream."

Is this the voice of a wartime documentary, or the lofted start of a 19th-century novel? The writer was John Huston, still in uniform in 1946. He was at Mason General Hospital in Astoria on Long Island (close to the old film studios), talking to soldiers who had been damaged by war even if they had all their body parts in the right places. The words would be part of the commentary (spoken by Walter Huston) for a documentary, *Let There Be Light*, one of the first studies of trauma, so antithetical to the

government's sense of what a war documentary should be that it was suppressed for more than 30 years. Huston believed 20 per cent of returned soldiers were suffering mental damage and the War Department was too horrified by that concept to do anything about it. They claimed that Huston had never obtained releases from the soldiers filmed. He had. But they had been "lost".

This is a long time ago, but in America now there are soldiers back from Iraq and Afghanistan, and Tarantino and the Andersons are not making movies about the wrecked survivors. (The only person who has come close to trying is Oliver Stone with his awkward but challenging *Untold History of the United States*.) As in 1945, America remains caught between its obligation to real experience and the drumbeat of 'Mission accomplished'. Our latest wars have been so removed from World War II. As volunteers and conscripts, a mass of Americans had gone off to war in the 1940s believing in its necessity, and justice, and a group of Hollywood's directors had set aside their professional careers to make encouraging movies. They hoped for truth while the War Department required propaganda. Mark Harris has identified this urge as evidence of the abiding

gap between dream and reality in American film. So *Five Came Back* is not just a great work of research, narrative and commentary, and one of the best books of American film history, but an enterprise that leads us to wonder whether film is ever adequate as a way of describing our madness.

*Five Came Back* is a group biography in which Frank Capra, John Ford, William Wyler, John Huston and George Stevens served the cause and were marked by the experience of war. The most innocent and hapless of these was Capra, who was given a position of command and control, but whose lifelong confusion of righteousness and self-interest, humanism and rosy vision, were exposed by the war. Capra was in charge of two important series – *Why We Fight* and *Know Your Enemy* – and Harris is honest about their shortcomings. But he is shrewd on the contradictions in pre-war Capra: he sees that the Mr Smith who went to Washington was an "overgrown child" in a world where populism and fascism easily merged. So Capra is the man who saw *Triumph of the Will* in 1942 and said, "We're dead. We're gone. We can't win this war." But when it was all over, and Capra got the Distinguished Service Medal from



General George Marshall himself. “I acted like an idiot, being completely speechless. I had to go out to the can and cry for ten minutes. Nothing has ever made me so proud.”

That’s Capra the gong-collector, too pleased with himself to realise the ambiguity in medals (think of the conclusion to Nicholas Ray’s *Bitter Victory*). As for Ford, he did it his own way – what else would you expect? He had his boat and his pals. He was unquestionably brave on *The Battle of Midway* (1942), getting wounded in the process of obtaining dangerous coverage, but then he was off and away, romancing and exaggerating his own story, and slipping from duty into drunkenness. Still, the hushed dismay of *They Were Expendable* (1945) grew out of Ford’s experience in which whole units could be sacrificed for the greater sake of official history. Ford and Capra were alike in that they challenged authority and craved it at the same time.

Wyler was German (born in Mülhausen) and Jewish. Resisting the set formula for doing a picture, he conceived the idea of the story of a bomber and its crew (it could have been a British approach). The result, *The Memphis Belle: A Story of a Flying Fortress* (1944), was one of the best of the wartime films, oblique and incidental, with

*Huston restaged much of ‘The Battle of San Pietro’ and then let the story build that it had been shot in real combat situations*

perilous live footage married to a re-enacted soundtrack done in the thoughtful safety of a studio. (Harris knows how nearly every one of these ‘documentaries’ was a skilled cheating of impossible reality.) It was in pursuing a sequel, *Thunderbolt* (1945), that Wyler incurred serious damage to his hearing that made him fear for his career and his family life.

But Wyler had the most triumphant comeback picture. Just as his *Mrs. Miniver* (1942) had been a travesty Best Picture but a genuine inducement to Americans to fight, so *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) is full of caring intentions, deep-focus naturalism and grave feelings we can still respect. Harris shows how the poignant corridor reunion scene, with Fredric March and Myrna Loy, was a version of something that had happened to Wyler and his wife Talli. But he has gone to original materials to reveal that the Fredric March character was once tormented by memories of child prostitutes; the Dana Andrews figure slept with many women overseas; and Homer – that shining Harold Russell hero – in the original was heavily brain-damaged. Ever since, Russell (who won the supporting actor Oscar for his hero, who has lost his hands) has been a vouchsafe for the film’s integrity. But now we can see how the MacKinlay Kantor blank-verse novel on which the film was based was softened. Yes, Homer/Russell has “hooks for hands”, but how does he caress his exquisitely idealised Cathy O’Donnell sweetheart?

Huston is the most fascinating and dangerous



John Huston’s *The Battle of San Pietro* (1944)

of the five because Harris doesn’t warm to him. We see Huston’s war as a restless, private time, hungering to go off after *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, and womanising in the hotels of New York and London. There was a cold, heartless side to Huston – in peace as well as war – but he hated the martial punchiness of many wartime documentaries. So he did *The Battle of San Pietro* (1944, in Italy), restaging much of it and then letting the story build that it had been shot in real combat situations, but delivering a work so tragic, so intent on corpses and damage, that it was drastically cut and about to be banned until General Marshall decided to show it to the troops, to educate (or warn) them. And then there was *Let There Be Light*, the second attempt by a man who hated the whole idea of making films that would let the home front and the waiting troops feel good about battle.

Then there was George Stevens, modest and introverted, whose career felt least settled as war began. He never quite got attached to one of the big war projects, but he had his own camera with him and after D-Day he became obsessed with recording everything he saw. That had a first set piece in the relief of Paris – as exciting as a

bullfight according to Stevens’s best buddy, Ivan Moffat. But as war pushed east, so Stevens came to Dachau. We have known this before and seen some of the 16mm colour footage Stevens shot. But Harris makes a momentous occasion out of Dachau in which Stevens was changed forever by its horrors. The second climax of his war career is when a film composed from this footage was put in evidence at the Nuremberg trials. “When the movie was finished, Göring turned to Hess in the box and said, ‘Justice Jackson [chief prosecutor, Robert Jackson] will want to join the Party now!’ But as the trial’s spectators stared at them, aghast, their jubilation disappeared. That night, an army psychiatrist who had been assigned to monitor the mental state of the defendants reported that most were ‘despondent’. Stevens’s films had done what weeks of testimony had not: it had made their crimes irrefutable, and their fates inevitable.”

Not everyone ‘came back’. Some cameramen lost their lives (it was always the most dangerous job). There were other casualties of war: the film critic Otis Ferguson was killed in the Merchant Marine; Carole Lombard died in a Nevada plane crash at the end of a tour selling war bonds. The famous five went back to Hollywood. Wyler made unnerving pictures about failure (*Carrie*, *The Heiress*) as well as fairy stories (*Roman Holiday*, *Ben-Hur*). Stevens turned from comedy to the pathos of *A Place in the Sun*, the mixed feelings over violence in *Shane*, the reluctance to face failed ideals in *Giant*, and then *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Ford would make *The Searchers*, Capra did *It’s a Wonderful Life*. In that search the searcher ended up a nomad; and the trust in a wondrous life was offset by Capra’s nightmare. Those films had turned on their own genres. But America hardly noticed this ruefulness. By then it had another war in which film directors risked being judged un-American if they lacked the correct antagonism towards an old ally. **S**



Pacific heights: John Wayne, Donna Reed and Robert Montgomery in Ford’s *They Were Expendable* (1945)



## FOOTLIGHTS with THE WORLD OF LIMELIGHT

By Charles Chaplin/David Robinson,  
Cineteca di Bologna, 226pp, hardback,  
£28, ISBN 9788895862828

### Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

Reassuringly hefty, and with a tasteful sheen to the pages, David Robinson's new volume presents itself as an attractive coffee-table book for cinephiles. But a surprise nests within, an attention-stealing book-within-a-book. This lovingly researched companion volume to Charlie Chaplin's wistful *Limelight* (1952), also contains a novella: the director's only known work of long fiction, which has never previously been published.

Chaplin's *Footlights*, completed in 1949, runs to some 34,000 words and tells a familiar story of an ageing alcoholic clown and a suicidal ballet dancer, thrown together in grubby Soho in summer 1914. It's *Limelight* foretold as light fiction, but it's more than that, fleshing out the details of the protagonists' troubled earlier lives, and introducing some fascinating characters who fell to the cutting-room floor during production. Chaplin's formal education was scanty, but it will surprise few who have seen his films to learn that his fiction writing is eloquent and confident – at times astonishingly vivid. Even at its most shamelessly sentimental (as when concern for the clown Calvero inspires the paralysed dancer Terry to walk again), this can be a compelling read. Certain passages in *Footlights*, such as the sequence following Terry's suicide attempt, involving



Clown prince: Chaplin and Bloom in *Limelight*

Calvero's efforts to assist her while avoiding the landlady's notice, read, image by image, more like a silent film scenario: a falling tear, a tin of salmon bumping down the stairs, an eye to a keyhole. Much of which is as it finally appears on screen. If there's a blot on Chaplin's prose it's a symptom of his desire for self-improvement: his vocabulary broadened clumsily by a word-for-the-day habit. Actors are described as "fanfaronading"; when Terry dances she is "efflorescing"; Calvero is not drunk, but "inebriously primed".

Chaplin was notoriously a perfectionist, and we can enjoy *Footlights* as a glimpse of the ideal *Limelight* within his head, one that flesh-and-blood actors could never replicate. Here among the many revisions is Terry's sorry history, along with her composer-soldier sweetheart, more fully drawn, and the intriguing 'Armless Wonder' Claudius. A separate set of documents gives us

Calvero's story: glory days in the music halls, and a cruel younger woman who broke his heart. These incidents and biographies, along with the texts and production stills reproduced in this book, give us an expanded, richer *Limelight* than many of us have known.

By untangling drafts and redrafts, Robinson's project teases out all the sources and inspirations for *Limelight*: from Chaplin's own biography and family history, to the many performers he worked with or admired on stage and in film, and his knowledge of London's music hall circuit. In fact, *Limelight* had a fantastically long gestation. The opening section of the book is devoted to Chaplin's meeting with Nijinsky in 1916, and his attempts to write a ballet story following that encounter (several variations are collated here), which were folded into *Footlights* three decades later. The Calvero of both *Limelight* and *Footlights* is a recognisably Chaplinesque tramp comedian (right down to the hat, 'tache and trousers), but Robinson explains that the character also carries stains of Chaplin's drunkard father, his mother, the father of his half-brother Wheeler Dryden, and to numerous comedians, including the Victorian star Dan Leno, whose sad stories were well known to Chaplin. Thus, the joy of the film's close-knit casting policy, including roles for Chaplin's children, two for Dryden, and cameos for Snub Pollard and Buster Keaton, becomes bittersweet.

*Limelight* was filmed many miles from Leicester Square, in Hollywood, with back projections of the London skyline and sets mimicking the gaslit interiors of *Punch* cartoons. But for all that, as this book beautifully illustrates, it's a radiant portrait of a time, a place and the stagebound preoccupations of a great film-maker. **S**

## TURNING POINT: 1997-2008

By Hayao Miyazaki, translated by Beth Cary and Frederik L. Schodt, Viz Media, 452pp, hardback, £20, ISBN 9781421560908

### Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

Coinciding with the release of Miyazaki Hayao's *The Wind Rises*, *Turning Point* is a second collection of the animator's talks and writings, following *Starting Point: 1979-1996*. The book's as big as its predecessor but much less substantial because of its narrower remit. It also assumes a fan's interest in and close acquaintance with Miyazaki's works and career, making little allowance for newcomers.

The pieces in *Starting Point* ranged far more widely than the book's title might suggest, covering more than 30 years of Miyazaki's animation, including half a dozen feature films. *Turning Point* restricts itself to the next decade and nearly all the film discussion focuses on just two titles, *Princess Mononoke* (1997) and *Spirited Away* (2001).

True, these pivotal films justify the book's name. They brought Miyazaki to wider global attention and were record-breaking hits in Japan. What comes through more in the book, though, is how they reflect Miyazaki's wider thinking and interests. *Princess Mononoke* was grounded in his fascination with Japanese history and anthropology. He was determined to "break the spell" of Kurosawa Akira's *Seven Samurai*, presenting a wider range of Japanese medieval people (hence, for example, his decision to base *Mononoke* around an ironworks). The book has

Miyazaki discussing history with Japanese academics; he also delivers an enthusiastic speech about a highland area of Japan, speculating on the country's ancient inhabitants.

*Turning Point* also shows how *Spirited Away* connects to Miyazaki's ideas about the healthy development of children, which involves rough-and-tumble play; practical skills such as the proper handling of knives; and the strict rationing, if not complete prohibition, of cartoons and comics for kids. (Miyazaki acknowledges the glaring irony of his own position as Japan's most famous animator, not to mention as a neglectful father to his own children.) In turn, these ideas inform Miyazaki's concept of the Ghibli Museum, which opened in Tokyo three months after *Spirited Away* and is the subject of several later pieces in the book.

*Turning Point* is illuminating on such subjects, yet it's exasperatingly disorganised. There's an enormous amount of repetition of points and ideas, while subjects that a reader would expect to be covered are absent. Both Miyazaki's films *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) and *Ponyo* (2008) are shown on the book's covers, for example, but there are only a few tantalising pages on *Ponyo* and nothing specifically on *Howl* at all – though some of Miyazaki's comments on 9/11 contextualise the war imagery in the latter film. There's also little on the actual process of animating, a major subject in *Starting Point*.

Many readers are likely to tire of the reams of pages on Japanese history and ecology, while individual pieces on other subjects come as a relief. These include Miyazaki's thoughts on the author and aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

## 'Turning Point' assumes a fan's interest in Miyazaki's works and career, making little allowance for newcomers

(these pieces foreshadow *The Wind Rises*) and the UK's Robert Westall, who wrote *The Machine Gunners*. A discussion of the Czech-British film *Dark Blue World* (2001) becomes a blistering attack on the films of Spielberg, Coppola and Peter Jackson. Ultimately, *Turning Point* is best for fans who want to know Miyazaki better as a person, his grumbings, hobbyhorses and all. **S**



Breaking the spell: Miyazaki Hayao



## HOLLYWOOD EXILES IN EUROPE

### The Blacklist and Cold War Film Culture

By Rebecca Prime, Rutgers University Press, 258pp, \$27.95, ISBN 9780813562612

#### Reviewed by Philip French

The first two books on Hollywood and the Cold War appeared between Winston Churchill's 1946 speech in Fulton, Missouri (where he stated ominously that "from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the continent") and May 1948 when Twentieth Century-Fox released *The Iron Curtain*, the first Cold War movie from a major studio. Written in late 1947, they were *Hollywood on Trial: The Story of the 10 Who Were Indicted* by Gordon Kahn published in the States, and *The Hollywood Trial* by 'Antonius' in Britain. They were occasioned by the first post-war hearings on Hollywood by the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), which resulted in a group of leftwing filmmakers, dubbed the Hollywood Ten, being cited for contempt of Congress (and subsequently jailed) for refusing to answer questions about their political beliefs. Neither book even hinted that communism represented a threat to democracy, and both argued that what was at stake was nothing less than the imminent prospect of America falling into the grip of fascism.

They were the beginning of a vast body of memoirs, biographies, historical studies and polemical texts to which Rebecca Prime's *Hollywood Exiles in Europe* is a valuable, level-headed addition. It begins with the growth of the Communist Party in Hollywood during the late 1930s, a response to the rise of fascism, the Depression, professional guilt and the party's seductive claim that communism was "20th-century Americanism". It ends with the 1999 Oscars ceremony when there were organised protests, heckling and the ostentatious withholding of applause when a special Academy Award was made to the 89-year-old Elia Kazan. He had never been forgiven for his appearance in 1952 before HUAC in which he confessed to having been a party member in the 1930s and named several fellow members. But Prime's chief concern is with the period between 1950 and the mid-1960s when several hundred people in the film industry were blacklisted for their radical political views, and a number of them crossed the Atlantic to carry on their business covertly in London, Paris and Rome. Others crossed the Rio Grande, the subject of Rebecca M. Schreiber's 2008 book *Cold War Exiles in Mexico*, which deals with novelists and painters as much as filmmakers.

Poorly paid (at least by Hollywood standards), the European exiles worked initially under pseudonyms on low-budget films, harassed by their embassies, which refused to renew passports, and under constant surveillance from the likes of MI5. They soon found their way in to the local movie industries, and those based in London attested to the help they received from both left and right, Joseph Losey being assisted by the Tory MP Sir Leslie Plummer, Carl Foreman by Aneurin Bevan and Michael Foot. On the continent the exiles clung together in mutual support but were esteemed by local cineastes. In Britain they became part of the arts scene but took time to find a public following. What particularly



On target: Jules Dassin's *Rififi* was the first big success enjoyed by a blacklisted writer

interests Prime is the way the principal figures – Losey, Foreman and Cy Endfield in London, John Berry and Jules Dassin in Paris – first established themselves with the kind of neo-realist, social-conscience *noir* movies they'd been making in Hollywood, and then coped with the changing face of international cinema. This came in overlapping phases – the 'runaway' productions that exploited Hollywood's frozen currency, international films that attracted the foreign audiences a shrinking Hollywood needed to appeal to, and the blockbusters that became a crucial part of the major studios' evolving policies. As part of this development, canny producers moved to Europe to exploit blacklisted talent and lower production costs, most famously Samuel Bronston (whose own studio outside Madrid was financed by Franco) and Sam Spiegel.

The first big success enjoyed by a blacklisted writer was Dassin's French thriller *Rififi* in 1955, though Clare Boothe Luce, America's right-wing ambassador to Italy, intervened to quash his next project. Dassin then turned to arthouse movies that disappointed his French admirers, who then embraced Losey as the key blacklisted auteur. Prime writes perceptively of the changing critical climate of the time.

Both Losey and Foreman, who'd collaborated under pseudonyms as director and screenwriter

of *The Sleeping Tiger* in 1954, were able to make accommodations with HUAC a few years later. With the help of ingenious American lawyers, they secured 'clearances' by which they renounced the Communist Party without having to go through the shaming process of naming names. Their careers thereafter diverged. Foreman, who thought it inappropriate to become involved in serious local themes, concentrated on war movies with big stars and exotic settings, starting uncredited on *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) and continuing with *The Guns of Navarone* (1961) and *Young Winston* (1972), on which he was also the producer. Losey moved away from his *noir* origins to become an acute student of British class manners in a trilogy – *The Servant* (1963), *Accident* (1967), *The Go-Between* (1970) – scripted by Harold Pinter, as well as a European arthouse director beginning with the Franco-Italian *Eve* (1962). Losey and Foreman died within a few days of each other in June 1984, and in my *Observer* obituary I suggested that "in their parallel lives and in their different responses to enforced exile there lies the plot for a great Hollywood novel or a joint biography that encompasses the crucial features of the cinema of our time".

Prime's *Hollywood Exiles* is a rich, well-researched and lucid book about a complex subject, and not the least of its ironies is that it's published by Rutgers University Press. In 1952 Rutgers fired the great classical scholar, Moses I. Finley after his refusal to collaborate with HUAC. He went into European exile, took British citizenship, received a knighthood and became Master of Darwin College, Cambridge. **S**

*The European exiles worked under pseudonyms on low-budget films, harassed by their embassies and under surveillance*





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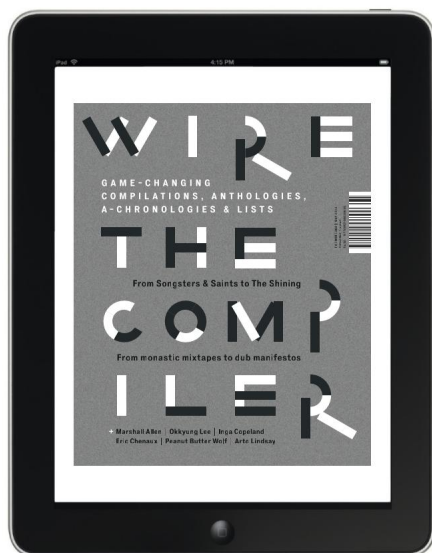
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# READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at *Sight & Sound*, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN Fax: 020 7436 2327 Email: [S&S@bfi.org.uk](mailto:S&S@bfi.org.uk)

## KRISH KRUSH

It's interesting that you named your *Under the Skin* feature *Unearthly Stranger* (*S&S*, April), this being the name of one of the very best British sci-fi films, by the extremely underrated John Krish. I'd love to know if Jonathan Glazer had seen it, as the two films have much in common. Also great to see that someone has finally realised what a great satire on the American Dream *Showgirls* is (*It Doesn't Suck: Showgirls*, 'Books', *S&S*, May).

Pete Brown by email

## SKIN GAME

I cannot understand the critical hyperbole surrounding *Under the Skin*. Having just finished the Michel Faber novel it was based on (which I truly liked), it beggars belief how much content has been stripped out in the transition. I realise that a film often has to be seen as a standalone project when comparing it with its source, but this is barebones stuff, and the 'art film' tag just doesn't wash. Why so many esteemed critics are frothing at the mouth is beyond me. The main character has been denied the emotional gravitas she has in the book and, crucially, the way she disposes of the men is incredible. Apart from Johansson, one can barely understand the dialogue, and there is precious little narrative drive. With its seemingly tacked on ending (again differing from the novel) and cinematography that much of the time warrants night-vision glasses, we are left with nothing but an empty cipher. My viewing partner, a German film student, agreed, and also felt it was poorly edited, and that Mica Levi's music was abrasive and repetitive. When the most arresting sequence in the film is a clip of the late Tommy Cooper, you realise you are in the presence of a professional chancer.

Pete Moore, Brighton

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

In critical commentary on *Under the Skin* there have been references to Craig Raine's 'Martian' poems and to Nicolas Roeg's 1976 sci-fi movie *The Man who Fell to Earth*. But, to the best of my knowledge, no reviewer of Jonathan Glazer's film has mentioned Eduardo Mendoza's 1991 Spanish satirical sci-fi novella, *No Word from Gurb* (*Sin noticias de Gurb*); notwithstanding that – like Raine's poems, Michel Faber's novel, *Under the Skin*, and Roeg's movie – Mendoza's book records the earthly apperceptions of a visiting extraterrestrial. Mendoza's novel is more lighthearted than Faber's macabre work but there are striking similarities, one being that in both narratives the aliens arrive in pairs that then become separated.

Another, largely overlooked, possible literary allusion in Glazer's movie, and in Faber's novel, may be discerned in the title, *Under the Skin*. In much the same way that Faber took the title of his most famous novel, *The Crimson Petal and the White*, from the first line of Tennyson's lyric "Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white",

## LETTER OF THE MONTH SYDNEY FURY



Your April interview with Jeremy Thomas ('Part I: The making of a super-producer', *S&S*) was of great interest down here for his recollections of a youthful Australian producing apprenticeship with director Philippe Mora (pictured above left with Thomas). It was nice to slot his story into a 100-year-plus tradition of wayward sons of the UK film industry making good or carrying on in Australia.

But although the art of oral history requires tolerance of stray memories, a number of small failings in Thomas's recollections (or perhaps errors in the transcription and fact-checking) are hard for us down here to ignore – and not just repeated references to the Australian city of 'Sidney'.

Thomas's encounter with Australian movie mogul Sir Norman Rich was probably actually

with Norman Rydges, whose company's and family's influence in Australia's cinema and leisure industries is still experienced by anyone watching a film in the Event cinema chain, or who've stayed in a Rydges Hotel.

And the information that Sydney's monumental State cinema no longer exists might just be news to the BFI's own head of cinemas and festivals Clare Stewart. It was only a few years ago that she was one in a long line of Sydney Film Festival artistic directors who have stood on the State's stage – and still do – to present that festival's films and guests. Those who want a taste of its magnificence should go to [www.statetheatre.com.au](http://www.statetheatre.com.au).

Quentin Turnour manager, Arc Canberra cinema programmes, National Film and Sound Archive of Australia

he seems to have adapted the title of *Under the Skin* from the concluding lines of Kipling's poem 'The Ladies': "For the Colonel's Lady and Judy O'Grady / Are sisters under their skins!"

This quotation from Kipling would certainly be relevant to the central theme of Glazer's film – a theme I take to be that of pupation into full womanhood: that is to say a tracing out (tragically truncated in the movie's storyline) of the integration of woman's psyche with her physicality into a new and benevolent wholeness. This theme of spiritual and physical metamorphosis has been rendered into myth in the classical Ovidian legend of Pygmalion and Galatea; and the same theme (with distinctive variations) is central to other sci-fi movies: notably, Tarkovsky's *Solaris* and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*.  
John Owston Southall

## TRUTH VALUE

I subscribe to *Sight & Sound* because I love film and I love great writing. Sometimes, though, it gets emptily aggressive. Calum Marsh, in his review of Godfrey Reggio's *Visitors* (*S&S*, April), calls 'talking heads' and 'recycled news footage' in documentaries pedestrian clichés. I can't think of anything more direct and affective than

a good talking head. And all news footage in movies is, by definition, recycled. Documentaries are about truth not style. So is great writing.

Paul Cunningham South Korea

## NOW IT MAKES SENSE

Philip Kemp hears comic nonsense in the German phrases dropped in to *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, citing "Ich war gespannt wie ein Fritzlburger" (review, *S&S*, March). I hear the no less comic but far from nonsensical "Ich bin gespannt wie ein Flitzebogen", which translates as the delightful "I'm taut like a toy bow" and has the sense of "The suspense is killing me." Spoken by Jude Law, not Tom Wilkinson, the use of this old idiom has tickled German audiences.

Waltraud Loges Programme & Research Coordinator, BFI Cinemas

## Additions and corrections

May p.68 *After the Night*, Certificate 15 99m 12s; p.71 *Cupcakes*, Certificate 12A 93m 9s; p.73 *An Episode in the Life of an Iron Picker*, Certificate 12A 74m 18s; p.74 *The Informant*, Certificate 15 115m 48s; p.78 *The Love Punch*, Certificate 12A 94m 10s; p.85 *The Raid 2 Berandal*, Certificate 18 150m 7s; p.88 *Tracks*, Certificate 12A 112m 42s; p.93 *You & Me Forever*, Not submitted for theatrical classification, Video certificate: 15, Running time: 82m 57s  
April p.80 *My Stuff*, Certificate 15 82m 59s  
February *Lone Survivor*, USA 2013, ©Georgia Film Fund Seventeen Holdings, LLC, Colour by DeLuxe.



# ACE IN THE HOLE



The low-angle final shot in Billy Wilder's blistering media satire emphasises the steep, fatal descent of his anti-hero newspaperman

**By Neil Sinyard**

Bleeding to death from a stab wound, ace reporter Chuck Tatum (Kirk Douglas) staggers into the newsroom of the *Albuquerque Sun-Bulletin* and shouts for its editor. "How'd you like to make yourself a thousand dollars a day, Mr Boot?" he asks. "I'm a thousand-dollars-a-day newspaperman. You can have me for nothing." With this bleak self-summation, Tatum crashes to the floor, his face just a few inches from the camera lens, whose positioning has anticipated his inevitable fall.

"Endings are very important," declared the countess in Billy Wilder's late elegiac masterpiece, *Fedora* (1978), and the ending of *Ace in the Hole* is one of Wilder's best. By this time he has brought his story full circle, tracing Tatum's downfall with uncompromising narrative logic. It has all begun in that same Albuquerque office, with Tatum pitching defiantly but desperately for a job after his drinking and womanising have got him expelled from his New York newsdesk. Yearning for a return to the big time, he has chanced upon a story about a cave-in in New Mexico that might be the break he has been looking for. Colluding with a corrupt sheriff (Ray Teal) who is up for re-election, he prolongs the rescue operation to give the story a chance to build, gains exclusive access to the trapped man so the news agencies are clamouring for his services,

and precipitates a media frenzy during which the area around the site of the cave-in becomes the camping place and fairground for a public merrily and morbidly following the action.

Unfortunately for Tatum, the plan caves in on him. The trapped man's condition deteriorates, the dubious rescue operation cannot be changed or accelerated, and when Tatum vents his fear and frustration on the man's vengeful wife (Jan Sterling), she retaliates by stabbing him with a pair of scissors. Despite Tatum's belated best efforts, his ace in the hole dies, and when Tatum tries to confess his crime (a scoop that might even top his original story), no one wants to listen. Tatum's scheme has depended on a happy ending he cannot deliver. By contrast, Wilder had a tragic ending in mind from the very start. The camera awaits Tatum's demise.

After the success of *Sunset Blvd.* (1950) and his severance of his longstanding writing partnership with Charles Brackett (whom many felt had been a restraining influence), Wilder had been given his head on this picture. But, not for the only time in his career, he found himself accused of going too far. His exposure of journalistic malpractice predictably enraged the press; and audiences also might have been discomfited by his depiction of the masses, who treat an occasion of human misery as a cause for curiosity and even entertainment. The head of Paramount studios, Y.

*Douglas's Tatum, like Welles's Harry Lime, is a dynamic demon whose monstrous egotism seems to invite a precipitous fate*

Frank Freeman (Wilder always thought that was less of a name than a legitimate enquiry), changed the title to *The Big Carnival* on the film's initial release in an attempt to broaden its appeal, but Wilder felt the switch was idiotic and misleading.

Although a box-office flop, Wilder always insisted it was one of his best films and exposed an uncomfortable truth about human nature. Viewed today, its critique of journalistic deceit and misrepresentation – and of the power of the media in shaping the perception of public events – seems more relevant than ever. Even at the time, only a few years after a devastating World War and a Holocaust that had accounted for several members of his own family, Wilder would not have felt he was exaggerating in any way the potential extremes of human cruelty nor the ease with which swathes of the populace could fall under the spell of a charismatic megalomaniac.

Which brings me back to the last shot. Tatum is not malevolent on the scale of, say, Cagney's psychotic gangster in *White Heat* (1949) or Welles's Harry Lime in *The Third Man* (1949) but like them he is a dynamic demon whose monstrous egotism seems to invite a precipitous fate. He over-reaches himself, and the low-angle final shot for his death (unscripted, apparently, and filmed with Wilder standing in a hole alongside his cameraman, Charles Lang Jr) eloquently emphasises the steep, fatal descent of an anti-hero who, only that day, had been addressing a multitude from a mountain top. His fall has the exclamatory thud of one of Tatum's own headlines – cave-in reporter has unwittingly dug his own grave; the ace in the hole is finally himself. ☹

**i** *Ace in the Hole* is out now on DVD and Blu-ray from Eureka! / Masters of Cinema

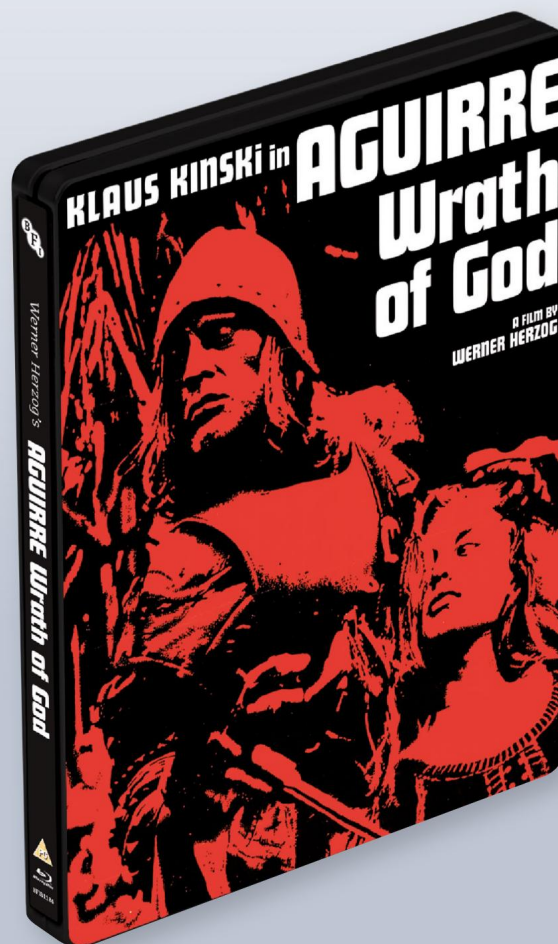


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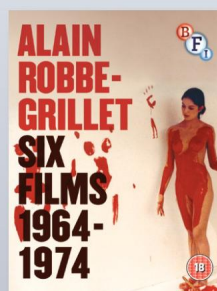
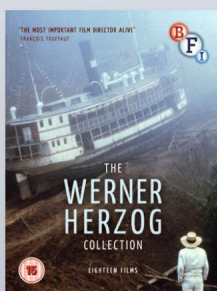
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